



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**THE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY-NAVY:  
TAIWAN...AND BEYOND?**

by

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December 2011

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**THE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY-NAVY: TAIWAN...AND BEYOND?**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Accompanying the People's Republic of China's (PRC) emergence as a global economic and diplomatic power has been the concurrent phenomenon of its rapid military modernization. This confluence has engendered policy concerns stemming from the notion that if the PRC continues with its current trend of military modernization its regional military influence could at some point potentially rival or surpass that of the United States. This has spawned myriad literature that confronts the subject of the PRC's military modernization.

General consensus indicates that the reintegration of Taiwan and countering United States intervention in such a conflict functions as a primary driver behind the PRC's recent military modernization. There is also a modicum of consensus that the PRC's burgeoning global stature has prompted the PLA to also pursue power-projection type endeavors such as sea line of communication (SLOC) defense and protection. Due to the intrinsic value of naval forces toward these goals, the PLAN functions as a sufficient microcosm through which to identify broad PLA intentions. This thesis objectively surveys the PLAN's modernization in order to determine the extent of the balance between the PRC's military problem sets of Taiwan and SLOC protection as impetus for the PLAN's modern mission paradigm.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

A2AD	Anti-Access Area Denial
AAD	Area Air Defense
ASCM	Ant-Ship Cruise Missile
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
DDG	Guided Missile Destroyer
HADR	Humanitarian Assistance Disaster Relief
LPD	Amphibious Transport Dock
MaRV	Maneuvering Re-entry Vehicle
MOOTW	Military Operations other than War
NCO	Non-commissioned Officer
NDU	National Defense University
OMTE	Outline of Military Training and Evaluation
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army-Air Force
PLAN	People's Liberation Army-Navy
PLANAF	People's Liberation Army-Navy Air Force
PRC	People's Republic of China
RAS	Replenishment at Sea
ROC	Republic of China on Taiwan
ROTC	Reserve Officer Training Corps
SLBM	Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile
SLOC	Sea Line of Communication
SSBN	Ballistic Missile Submarine
SSN	Fast Attack Submarine
TRA	Taiwan Relations Act

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# **I. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION**

The last three decades witnessed the emergence of the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a global economic and diplomatic power. This emergence has also been accompanied by rapid military modernization. This confluence has engendered United States policy concerns stemming from the notion that, if the PRC continues with its current trend of military modernization, its regional military influence could at some point potentially rival or surpass that of the United States. This element of the theory has spawned myriad scholarship work and policy reports that confront the subject of the modernization of the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

Contemporary policy work and scholarship analyzing the PLA's modernization have yielded a general consensus on the core premise that "the PLA is developing the capability to deter Taiwan independence or influence Taiwan to settle the dispute on Beijing's terms while simultaneously attempting to deter, delay or deny any possible United States support for the island in case of conflict."<sup>1</sup> There is also a modicum of consensus that the PRC's burgeoning diplomatic and economic stature has prompted the PLA to also pursue additional power projection type goals such as defending the PRC's sea lines of communication (SLOCs). Due to the intrinsic value of naval forces for these goals, the PLAN functions as a sufficient microcosm through which to identify broad PLA intentions and goals.

The goal of this thesis is to assess this presumed dynamic. This thesis surveys the PLAN's development and modernization in order to assess the balance between the PRC's military problem sets of Taiwan and SLOC protection as impetus for the PLAN's modern mission paradigm.

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2010* (Washington, D.C. 2010), I.

## **B. IMPORTANCE**

Responsible analysis of the PLAN first requires acknowledgement of the fact that in the last decade the PLAN has been subject to significant modernization efforts encompassing upgrades to its materiel, personnel and training establishments. These efforts have provoked significant speculative explanations as to the reasons for, as well as the goals and implications of the PLAN's recent modernization.

Pursuant to this, the priority modernization of the PLAN has attracted the attention of the United States military and has been captured in several recent United States Department of Defense, congressional and intelligence publications that focus on the development and status of the PLAN.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, assessments of the PLAN's modernization have been influential in altering United States military strategy writ large. As Robert Kaplan observes, "the U.S. Navy's new maritime strategy, unveiled in October 2007...both states and implies that the (U.S.) Navy will henceforth seek a sustained, forward presence in the...western Pacific, but less so in the Atlantic."<sup>3</sup> Increasingly, recent scholarly and policy work ascribes the Chinese naval modernization effort to the PRC's primary politico-military problem set of Taiwan and the PRC's growing attention on SLOC defense.

## **C. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES**

Central to the PRC's military problem sets of Taiwan and SLOC defense are broader political themes regarding the PRC—the most overarching of which is the perpetuation of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) absolute authority. This notion is particularly applicable to the Taiwan issue as it is generally asserted that Taiwan's

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<sup>2</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2010* (Washington, D.C. 2010). Ronald O'Rourke, "China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities-Background and Issues for Congress," *Congressional Research Service*, RL33153 (April 2011). Office of Naval Intelligence, "The People's Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics," Office of Naval Intelligence, 2009 [http://www.oni.navy.mil/Intelligence\\_Community/docs/china\\_army\\_navy.pdf](http://www.oni.navy.mil/Intelligence_Community/docs/china_army_navy.pdf) (accessed July, 14, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power* (New York: Random House, 2010), 9.



independence is intrinsically tied to the CCP's legitimacy vis-à-vis the PRC populace.<sup>4</sup> The implication of this argument, Susan Shirk argues, is that "if China's leaders believe the regime's survival is at stake, they would feel compelled to react militarily to an independence referendum."<sup>5</sup> Further compounding the Taiwan issue from a politico-military standpoint is the precedent set by the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis, during which the United States dispatched multiple aircraft carrier strike groups to the area. As a result, the influence of the Taiwan issue functions as a significant factor toward effective analysis of the PLAN's contemporary trajectory.

The pervasive specter of CCP demise is also pertinent to the notion that the PLAN is pursuing power projection capability because of Beijing's aspirations of SLOC security. This derives from the judgment, as Aaron Friedberg argues, that the PRC:

Economic engine is now so large...that it requires vast and expanding volumes of energy, minerals and agricultural raw materials to keep it going (and) an increasing fraction of what China requires to maintain forward momentum must be brought in from beyond the PRC's borders.<sup>6</sup>

This dynamic has engendered the speculation that "ensuring a regular flow of energy imports into China will increasingly become the responsibility of the Chinese military (thus) the PLAN may increasingly feel the need to patrol the (PRC's) SLOCs."<sup>7</sup> In a similar vein as the Taiwan issue, "the CCP's (consideration of) rapid economic growth (as a) political imperative"<sup>8</sup> has influential reverberations in PRC security policy—specifically as it applies to the modern PLAN.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that the threat of United States intervention in a Taiwan conflict is the main driver of the PLAN's modernization. To bolster this argument, this thesis asserts that Taiwan is the most exigent politico-military threat to the

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<sup>4</sup> Susan Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>6</sup> Aaron Friedberg, "Going Out: China's Pursuit of Natural Resources and Implications for the PRC's Grand Strategy," *NBR Analysis* 17, no. 3 (September 2006): 7.

<sup>7</sup> David Shambaugh, "China's Military Modernization: Making Steady and Surprising Progress," in *Strategic Asia 2005–06: Military Modernization in an Era of Uncertainty*, ed. Ashley J. Tellis and Michael Wills (Washington, D.C.: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2005), 77.

<sup>8</sup> Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower*, 54.

CCP and that within this paradigm the PLA has identified the United States military as the most significant obstacle regarding Taiwan's re-integration. This thesis indicates that the PLAN's recent force development reinforces the PLAN's primary focus on the United States within the framework of a Taiwan conflict. Furthermore, in consideration of historic and current trends, this thesis argues that the PLAN's SLOC power projection designs are limited and does not function as a significant force shaping priority.

#### **D. LITERATURE REVIEW**

As previously indicated, the PLAN's modernization has stimulated a significant body of scholarship and policy work. Contemporary work on the PLAN is complemented by large literature that addresses the broader related topics of PRC energy concerns, security, and domestic and foreign policy. Consideration of the PLAN as it pertains to the Taiwan and SLOC power projection paradigms requires division of the relevant literature into three broad categories: PRC strategy and policy, the PLA writ large, and evaluations of the PLAN. Within these broad categories are multiple sub-categories—all of which have some degree of bearing regarding consideration of the PLAN's modernization model.

Review of the broad category of PRC strategy and policy in the context of the research question yields two pertinent sub-categorical divisions. The first entails a general survey of the contemporary PRC. Dominating this sub-category is Susan Shirk's *China: Fragile Superpower*—in which she outlines via thorough analysis of PRC-related phenomena<sup>9</sup> the overarching domestic political backdrop: “the weak legitimacy of the (CCP) and its leaders' sense of vulnerability.”<sup>10</sup> Rounding out this sub-category is another survey work: Marc Lanteigne's *Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction*.<sup>11</sup> Though lacking significant analytical depth, Lanteigne's treatment outlines the broad-strokes of PRC foreign policy via consideration of the PRC's position within the global

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<sup>9</sup> Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower*, 1–320.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>11</sup> Marc Lanteigne, *Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

economic dynamic, the role of the PLA, and regional/ United States relations.<sup>12</sup> Both Shirk and Lanteigne's works provide a foundation for research as they delineate the broader fundamentals of the PRC's contemporary domestic and foreign policy dynamics—both of which are significant factors regarding detailed analysis of the PLA and more specifically, the PLAN.

The other sub-category of PRC strategy and policy deals with PRC machinations vis-à-vis its burgeoning energy concerns. Christopher J. Pehrson's 2006 article "*String of Pearls: Meeting the Challenge of China's Rising Power across the Asian Littoral*" provides a clear definition for what is widely considered the PRC's practical application for addressing the vulnerability of its SLOC dependence:

The 'String of Pearls'...(as) each 'pearl'...is a nexus of Chinese geopolitical influence or military presence (and they) extend from the coast of mainland China through the littorals of the South China Sea, the Strait of Malacca, across the Indian Ocean, and on to the littorals of the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf.<sup>13</sup>

Andrew S. Erickson and Gabriel B. Collins offer further insight by outlining and assessing the overall efficacy of the PRC's overland pipeline endeavors.<sup>14</sup> Finally, a recent article by Christina Lin provides an updated and comprehensive evaluation of the PRC's approach to its energy quandary.<sup>15</sup>

Consideration of the PLA writ large also breaks down into two sub-categories: the PLA in a historical context, and comprehensive force assessments. The survey approach dominates the literature on the PLA in its historical context, from its founding to the present. John Gittings' *The Role of the Chinese Army* offers an insightful assessment of the early decades of the PLA, analyzing the strategy, action and modernization efforts of

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 1–153.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher J. Pehrson, "String of Pearls: Meeting the Challenge of China's Rising Power across the Asian Littoral," *Strategic Studies Institute* (July 2006), <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=721> (accessed July 26, 2011), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew S. Erickson and Gabriel B. Collins, "China's Oil Security Pipe Dream: The Reality, and Strategic Consequences, of Seaborne Imports," *Naval War College Review* 63, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 89–111.

<sup>15</sup> Christina Lin, "The New Silk Road: China's Energy Strategy in the Greater Middle East," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* Policy Focus #109, (April 2011), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/pubPDFs/PolicyFocus109.pdf> (accessed July 27, 2011).

the PLA from the Civil War through the first 15 years of the PRC's existence.<sup>16</sup> Ellis Joffe's *The Chinese Army after Mao* traces the evolution of the PLA—against the backdrop of Mao's precedent—over the decade that follows his death.<sup>17</sup> Nan Li provides an adequate interpretation of PLA development through the mid-1990s,<sup>18</sup> highlighting “how (the modern) doctrine of ‘limited war under high technology conditions’ (was) formulated.”<sup>19</sup> Gerald Segal's *Defending China* offers a more case-based approach to the PLA by analyzing the PLA's major conflicts from 1949 through 1979.<sup>20</sup> Finally, Paul H.B. Godwin<sup>21</sup> and Thomas Christensen<sup>22</sup> use broad empirical analysis in the contemporary context to formulate evaluations of the PLA in the recent period.

Comprehensive PLA force assessments comprise the other major sub-category of broad PLA evaluation literature. Scope and analysis vary within this sub-category. Dennis J. Blasko's *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* focuses primarily on the ground forces,<sup>23</sup> while authors like David Shambaugh<sup>24</sup> and Richard D. Fisher, Jr.<sup>25</sup> offer broader, more encompassing evaluations. In 2011, the United States Office of the Secretary of Defense issued its annual report to congress which offers the Pentagon's most authoritative and comprehensive public assessment of

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<sup>16</sup> John Gittings, *The Role of the Chinese Army* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

<sup>17</sup> Ellis Joffe, *The Chinese Army after Mao* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> Nan Li, “The PLA's Evolving Warfighting Doctrine, Strategy and Tactics, 1985–95: A Chinese Perspective,” *The China Quarterly* no. 146, Special Issue: China's Military in Transition (June 1996), 443–463.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 458.

<sup>20</sup> Gerald Segal, *Defending China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>21</sup> Paul H.B. Godwin, “Change and Continuity in Chinese Military Doctrine, 1949–1999,” in *Chinese Warfighting: The PLA Experience Since 1949*, eds. Mark A. Ryan, David M. Finkelstein, and Michael A. McDevitt (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 23–55.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas J. Christensen, “Windows and War: Trend Analysis and Beijing's Use of Force,” in *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy*, eds. Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross (California: Stanford University Press, 2006), 50–85.

<sup>23</sup> Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> David Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems and Prospects* (California: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> Richard D. Fisher, Jr., *China's Military Modernization: Building for Regional and Global Reach* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2008).

the PLA.<sup>26</sup> Previous iterations of this report also provide relevant insight.<sup>27</sup> Also in 2011, the PRC released its annual national defense white paper which functions as its primary foreign policy communique regarding the status and bearing of the PLA.<sup>28</sup> Collectively, the works within this sub-category provide the baseline from which to analyze the PLA and the PLAN.

The literature dedicated to PRC sea power and the PLAN dominates the third broad category in this review. Like the other two broader literature categories, the PLAN category can also be broken into three sub-categories: PLAN force assessments, PRC maritime strategy assessments, and PLAN power projection. Three core works offer PLAN force assessment. First, the Office of Naval Intelligence's (ONI) 2009 publication *The People's Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics* provides a comprehensive survey of the PLAN, including command and control, materiel, personnel and training.<sup>29</sup> The second edition of Bernard D. Cole's *The Great Wall at Sea: China's Navy in the Twenty-First Century* also surveys the PLAN in a similar manner as the ONI report, but Cole expands further upon contextual factors that have shaped the PLAN.<sup>30</sup> Finally, Ronald O'Rourke's regularly updated Congressional Research Service report on the PLAN provides a synopsis of its recent modernization.<sup>31</sup>

Additional work within the sub-category of PLAN force assessments is more specialized—focusing primarily on particular components of the PLAN. Andrew S.

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<sup>26</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2011* (Washington, D.C. 2011).

<sup>27</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2010* (Washington, D.C. 2010). Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military Power of the People's Republic of China, 2007* (Washington, D.C. 2007).

<sup>28</sup> The People's Republic of China Information Office of the State Council, *China's National Defense in 2010*, (March 2011), [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-03/31/c\\_13806851.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-03/31/c_13806851.htm) (accessed September 21, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, "The People's Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics," Office of Naval Intelligence, 2009 [http://www.oni.navy.mil/Intelligence\\_Community/docs/china\\_army\\_navy.pdf](http://www.oni.navy.mil/Intelligence_Community/docs/china_army_navy.pdf) (accessed July, 14, 2011).

<sup>30</sup> Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea: China's Navy in the Twenty-First Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2010).

<sup>31</sup> Ronald O'Rourke, "China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities-Background and Issues for Congress," *Congressional Research Service*, RL33153 (April 2011).

Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, William S. Murray and Andrew R. Wilson's edited essay collection *China's Future Nuclear Submarine Force*<sup>32</sup> offers what Scott W. Bray's review of the book describes as "important aspects of China's submarine force that explain the rationale for Beijing's large submarine investment."<sup>33</sup> Nan Li and Christopher Weuve discuss the "major changes in the...conditions that are necessary and would be largely sufficient for China to acquire aircraft carriers."<sup>34</sup> In the book *A War Like No Other: The Truth about China's Challenge to America*,<sup>35</sup> authors Richard C. Bush and Michael E. O'Hanlon assess the PLAN's amphibious forces, particularly in the context of Taiwan.<sup>36</sup> Daniel J. Kostecka offers analysis on "how China will seek to employ its aircraft carriers and modern amphibious assault ships."<sup>37</sup> Capping this sub-category, Vitaliy O. Pradun evaluates PLAN missile capabilities, especially with regard to "(PLAN procurement) over the past decade...of ASCMs (Anti-Ship Cruise Missiles)."<sup>38</sup>

With regard to assessments of PRC maritime strategy, Paul An-hao Huang's work *The Maritime Strategy of China in the Asia-Pacific Region: Origins, Development and Impact* is a comprehensive analysis of PRC maritime strategy primarily in the context of defense and security.<sup>39</sup> Thomas M. Kane's *Chinese Grand Strategy and Maritime Power* takes a similar approach, although it brings to bear in greater measure Chinese

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<sup>32</sup> Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, William S. Murray and Andrew R. Wilson, eds., *China's Future Nuclear Submarine Force* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2007).

<sup>33</sup> Scott W. Bray, "Turning to the Sea...This Time to Stay," *Asia Policy*, no. 9 (January 2010): 168.

<sup>34</sup> Nan Li and Christopher Weuve, "China's Aircraft Carrier Ambitions: An Update," *Naval War College Review* 63, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 13, 13–31.

<sup>35</sup> Richard C. Bush and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *A War Like No Other: The Truth about China's Challenge to America* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2007).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 187–195.

<sup>37</sup> Daniel J. Kostecka, "PLA Doctrine and the Employment of Sea-Based Airpower," *Naval War College Review* 64, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 27, 11–30.

<sup>38</sup> Vitaliy O. Pradun, "From Bottle Rockets to Lightning Bolts: China's Missile Revolution and PLA Strategy Against U.S. Military Intervention," *Naval War College Review* 64, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 12, 7–38.

<sup>39</sup> Paul An-hao Huang, *The Maritime Strategy of China in the Asia-Pacific Region: Origins, Development and Impact* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010).

history and the global impact of PRC maritime strategy.<sup>40</sup> James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara's work *Chinese Naval Strategy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Turn to Mahan*<sup>41</sup> considers PRC maritime strategy through the prism of Alfred Thayer Mahan's concept of "sea power (which) was not strictly equivalent to naval power...(rather) defined... variously in economic and military terms."<sup>42</sup> Holmes and Yoshihara build upon this in their later work *Red Star over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy*, "(contending) that China's access-denial strategy is only one facet of a broader, more sustained Chinese nautical challenge to the United States."<sup>43</sup> Rounding out this sub-category is Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and Carnes Lord's edited collection of work offering a comparative evaluation of the PRC's maritime strategy in *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective*.<sup>44</sup>

With regard to power projection, Gabriel B. Collins, Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein and William S. Murray's edited essay collection *China's Energy Strategy: The Impact on Beijing's Maritime Policies*<sup>45</sup> collectively articulates a dominant theme—"the issue of an interconnection between Chinese energy and naval strategies."<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Holslag also assesses this theme.<sup>47</sup> Andrew Erickson and Lyle Goldstein's article *Gunboats for China's New 'Grand Canals'? Probing the Intersection of Beijing's Naval and Oil Security Policies* approaches the same theme, but expands on it by "(discussing) PLA doctrinal writings relevant to SLOC protection missions (and offering) potential

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas M. Kane, *Chinese Grand Strategy and Maritime Power* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002).

<sup>41</sup> James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, *Chinese Naval Strategy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Turn to Mahan* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> Holmes and Yoshihara, *Chinese Naval Strategy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Turn to Mahan*, 11.

<sup>43</sup> Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 6.

<sup>44</sup> Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and Carnes Lord, eds., *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2009).

<sup>45</sup> Gabriel B. Collins, Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein and William S. Murray, eds., *China's Energy Strategy: The Impact on Beijing's Maritime Policies* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>47</sup> Jonathan Holslag, "Khaki and Commerce: The Military Implications of China's Trade Ambitions," *Issues and Studies* 45, no. 3 (September 2009): 37–67.

leading indicators of Chinese development of a navy capable of long-range SLOC protection.”<sup>48</sup> The capstone work within this sub-category—Christopher D. Yung and Ross Rustici with Isaac Kardon and Joshua Wiseman’s *China’s Out of Area Naval Operations: Case Studies, Trajectories, Obstacles and Potential Solutions* deploys an index-based approach using other nations’ historical data as a framework for assessing observed PLAN out of area behavior.<sup>49</sup>

Broadly, the literature reviewed here reinforces the notion that Taiwan and SLOC protection are foremost priorities of the PLA and PLAN. Within this paradigm, the general consensus is that the exigencies of the Taiwan issue dominate the PLAN’s strategic planning and resultant modernization. However, this literature also generally posits that due to the emerging relevance of PRC SLOC protection the PLAN has also embarked on nascent power-projection capabilities pursuant to that mission. This thesis will argue that Taiwan is the primary impetus behind the PLAN’s modernization but challenge the general assertion that it has significant power-projection designs predicated on SLOC protection.

## **E. METHODOLOGY AND FRAMEWORK**

The goal of this thesis is to determine the extent to which the PRC’s presumptive military missions of Taiwan and SLOC protection are driving the PLAN’s modernization. The methodological approach to this largely corresponds to the broad categorical and sub-categorical themes outlined in the literature review. Due to the fact that pertinent literature is an amalgamation of historical surveys, comparative analyses and case study-type approaches, the resultant analytical tactic for this thesis is a hybrid of historical and case study methods. This unique approach demands a two-pronged strategy.

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<sup>48</sup> Andrew Erickson and Lyle Goldstein, “Gunboats for China’s New ‘Grand Canals’? Probing the Intersection of Beijing’s Naval and Oil Security Policies,” *Naval War College Review* 62, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 45, 43–76.

<sup>49</sup> Christopher D. Yung and Ross Rustici with Isaac Kardon and Joshua Wiseman, “China’s Out of Area Naval Operations: Case Studies, Trajectories, Obstacles and Potential Solutions,” *Institute for National Strategic Studies China Strategic Perspectives*, no. 3 (December 2010).



Primarily drawing from work outlined in the PRC strategy and policy and PLA writ large literature review categories, the first prong relies heavily on historical analysis to identify and assign observed trend lines to the PLA, the PLAN as its microcosm and PRC threat perceptions. With respect to trend analysis of the PLA and PLAN, sourcing largely draws from the previously outlined historical interpretations of John Gittings, Ellis Joffe, Nan Li and Gerald Segal as the collective of these works is sufficient in both historical and analytical breadth to gauge an accurate overarching assessment of the PLA.<sup>50</sup> Supplementary sources to this broad PLA analysis vis-à-vis the PLAN primarily draw on Thomas M. Kane's, James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara's works relating to PRC maritime strategy,<sup>51</sup> and Bernard Cole's historical contextualization.<sup>52</sup> Sourcing for this thesis's assessment of PRC threat perceptions also draws on these historical surveys but is also augmented by politically-focused works such as those authored by Susan Shirk and Marc Lanteigne.<sup>53</sup> Work which focuses on potential PRC politico-military issues pertinent to power projection and SLOC defense such as those by Robert Kaplan, Christopher Pehrson, and Christina Lin also inform this assessment.<sup>54</sup> The intended yield of this approach is to properly couch the military problem sets of Taiwan and SLOC power projection in relation to current PRC threat perceptions and correspondent employment of the PLAN.

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<sup>50</sup> John Gittings, *The Role of the Chinese Army* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967). Ellis Joffe, *The Chinese Army after Mao* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987). Nan Li, "The PLA's Evolving Warfighting Doctrine, Strategy and Tactics, 1985–95: A Chinese Perspective," *The China Quarterly* no. 146, Special Issue: China's Military in Transition (June 1996), 443–463. Gerald Segal, *Defending China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>51</sup> Thomas M. Kane, *Chinese Grand Strategy and Maritime Power* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002). James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, *Chinese Naval Strategy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Turn to Mahan* (New York: Routledge, 2008). Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2010).

<sup>52</sup> Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea: China's Navy in the Twenty-First Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2010).

<sup>53</sup> Susan Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). Marc Lanteigne, *Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>54</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power* (New York: Random House, 2010). Christopher J. Pehrson, "String of Pearls: Meeting the Challenge of China's Rising Power across the Asian Littoral," *Strategic Studies Institute* (July 2006). Christina Lin, "The New Silk Road: China's Energy Strategy in the Greater Middle East," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* Policy Focus #109, (April 2011).

Against this backdrop, the second prong relies significantly upon literature outlined in the broad PLAN category and uses a disciplined case study tack to analyze the current doctrine, personnel and equipment of the modern PLAN. As a result, sourcing for this element of this thesis draws primarily from unclassified United States intelligence and government publications such as the comprehensive PLA/PLAN assessments published by ONI, the Congressional Research Service and the Pentagon.<sup>55</sup> These broader sources are supplemented by more specific analytical pieces such as those in the three essay collections *China's Future Nuclear Submarine Force*, *China's Energy Strategy: The Impact on Beijing's Maritime Policies* and *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective*<sup>56</sup> as well as past Naval War College Review publications.<sup>57</sup> The intended output of the second prong is a clear, data-based assessment of the direction of the PLAN's current mission model vis-à-vis Taiwan or SLOC protection.

Based on the methodology outlined above, this thesis is organized into three more chapters. The next chapter presents a brief historical survey of the PLA—and the PLAN as its subordinate service—since PRC's inception in 1949, which identifies contextual threat-based trends and characteristics. The second chapter also includes a comparative

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<sup>55</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, "The People's Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics," Office of Naval Intelligence, 2009. Ronald O'Rourke, "China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress," *Congressional Research Service*, RL33153 (April 22, 2011). Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2011* (Washington, D.C. 2011). Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2010* (Washington, D.C. 2010).

<sup>56</sup> Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, William S. Murray and Andrew R. Wilson, eds., *China's Future Nuclear Submarine Force* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2007). Gabriel B. Collins, Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein and William S. Murray, eds., *China's Energy Strategy: The Impact on Beijing's Maritime Policies* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2008). Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and Carnes Lord, eds., *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2009).

<sup>57</sup> Andrew S. Erickson and Gabriel B. Collins, "China's Oil Security Pipe Dream: The Reality, and Strategic Consequences, of Seaborne Imports," *Naval War College Review* 63, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 89–111. Daniel J. Kostecka, "PLA Doctrine and the Employment of Sea-Based Airpower," *Naval War College Review* 64, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 11–30. Vitaliy O. Pradun, "From Bottle Rockets to Lightning Bolts: China's Missile Revolution and PLA Strategy Against U.S. Military Intervention," *Naval War College Review* 64, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 7–38. Andrew Erickson and Lyle Goldstein, "Gunboats for China's New 'Grand Canals'? Probing the Intersection of Beijing's Naval and Oil Security Policies," *Naval War College Review* 62, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 43–76. Nan Li and Christopher Weuve, "China's Aircraft Carrier Ambitions: An Update," *Naval War College Review* 63, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 13–31.

analysis of the Taiwan and SLOC protection security paradigms to identify which of the two models poses the greatest threat to the PRC. Against this backdrop, the third chapter outlines an elemental analysis of the PLAN's modernization to include sections devoted to equipment, personnel, training and operations. The concluding chapter assimilates the analytical conclusions of Chapters II and III to construct this thesis' final argument as to the overall status and bearing of the contemporary PLAN.

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## II. THE PRC SECURITY CONTEXT

This chapter is comprised of two sections. The first section offers a survey of the PLA since 1949. This section also includes a sub-section dedicated to the PLAN's observed historical behavior and evolution as the PLA's subordinate service. The second section analyzes and contrasts Taiwan and SLOC protection as contemporary PRC security problem sets. These analyses conclude that 1) the PLA writ large—and the PLAN as its subordinate—has historically been and continues to be defensively focused and oriented toward the prevalent threat to PRC territorial sovereignty and 2) this paradigm, though nuanced, remains applicable in the PRC's contemporary politico-military climate as the threat of the United States in a Taiwan re-integration conflict functions as the main impetus behind the PLA's—and by extension PLAN's—modernization.

### A. THE PLA SINCE 1949

Within the contemporary global order, the PRC's development as a diplomatic and economic force is happening alongside its rapid military modernization. This dynamic serves as the framework for the increasingly pervasive “China threat theory (which) maintains that China will use its burgeoning power to destabilize regional security.”<sup>58</sup> From a historical perspective, this theory is not without precedent but “all of the PLA's military contingencies since 1949 have been local, limited wars (as) all have been fought on or extremely close to China's land borders.”<sup>59</sup> This is a direct result of the fact that the PLA has historically been oriented toward the PRC's “strategic objective (of) defending national sovereignty and territorial integrity.”<sup>60</sup> The PRC itself maintains this theme as its most recent white paper articulates that “following the founding of the

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<sup>58</sup> Emma V. Broomfield, “Perceptions of Danger: The China Threat Theory,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 12, no. 35 (2003): 266.

<sup>59</sup> Godwin, “Change and Continuity in Chinese Military Doctrine, 1949–1999,” 41.

<sup>60</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 2011, 9.

New China in 1949, the PLA set a general guideline and objective of building outstanding, modernized and revolutionary armed forces...for the purpose of self-defense.”<sup>61</sup>

There is a modicum of scholarly work that opposes the premise that there is a definitive pattern outlining the PRC’s historical use of force. Gerald Segal argues flatly “that in the main no such consistency or logic really exists.”<sup>62</sup> Thomas J. Christensen echoes this sentiment with his nuanced, context-dependent argument that the PRC historically employs “the use of force...as (either) a solution to a security problem (or) as a method of shaping longer-term international security trends (and) most frequently when it perceived an opening window of vulnerability or a closing window of opportunity.”<sup>63</sup> Christensen also invokes the importance of “political trends in China’s own alliances and in the alliances formed among China’s actual or potential enemies.”<sup>64</sup> To be sure, every instance of PRC use of force since 1949 has certain unique contextual elements that contributed to the PRC’s military course of action. This chapter does not contest that point. This chapter argues that the PRC’s historical use of force was always undertaken within the overarching framework of the defense of territorial sovereignty.

To bolster this argument, this chapter outlines a comprehensive survey of PLA guidance and doctrine since 1949. This analysis will indicate that PLA doctrine is primarily defensively centered and oriented toward the prevalent threat to PRC territory and territorial claims. The chapter will then take a hybrid case-study/survey approach toward the historical employment of the PRC’s use of force since 1949 by analyzing the PRC’s conflicts with Korea, India, the Soviet Union, and with Vietnam in 1979. Included in this evaluation will be a section dedicated to the PLAN that will identify its role as a complementary service within the broader PRC security apparatus. This will

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<sup>61</sup> The People’s Republic of China Information Office of the State Council, *China’s National Defense in 2010*, (March 2011), 7.

<sup>62</sup> Segal, *Defending China*, 1.

<sup>63</sup> Christensen, “Windows and War: Trend Analysis and Beijing’s Use of Force,” 52.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

indicate that the common thread regarding PRC use of force is that it is primarily defensive and used in response to threats to or actual infringements upon PRC territorial sovereignty.

## **1. PLA Doctrine: Playing Defense**

Within the PRC's political construct, the PLA functions as a subservient element to the CCP.<sup>65</sup> This dynamic was manifest early on “when the Chinese Communists came to power in 1949, (as) one of their most urgent tasks was to convert their victorious but primitive army into an armed force capable of defending China from external enemies.”<sup>66</sup> Hence, The PRC's infancy required the adoption of a primarily defensive strategy and the direct result was the adoption of the doctrine known as active defense.<sup>67</sup>

Enduring until today, the principle of active defense functions as the overarching doctrinal guidance for the PLA.<sup>68</sup> The core dictum of active defense is that it “posits a defensive military strategy in which China does not initiate wars or fight wars of aggression, but engages in war only to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity.”<sup>69</sup> Taken at face value, the principle of active defense can be interpreted as solely defensive and retaliatory in nature; active defense's underlying intent, however, advocates the “conduct (of) offensive operations within a defensive strategy.”<sup>70</sup> Further complicating this overarching guidance are PRC assertions that enemy attack could also assume extra-military form, particularly in the political realm.<sup>71</sup> Subsequent analysis will

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<sup>65</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 2011, 10.

<sup>66</sup> Joffe, *The Chinese Army after Mao*, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Godwin, “Change and Continuity in Chinese Military Doctrine, 1949–1999,” 25.

<sup>68</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 2011, 22.

<sup>69</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military Power of the People's Republic of China*, 2007 (Washington, D.C. 2007), 12.

<sup>70</sup> Godwin, “Change and Continuity in Chinese Military Doctrine, 1949–1999,” 25.

<sup>71</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 2011, 25.

indicate that non-kinetic and political factors have played a role in the practical application of active defense. However, this dynamic has never obviated active defense's core doctrinal mandate.

Ellis Joffe maintains that the fundamental “function of a military doctrine is to provide guidelines for the conduct of a war the armed forces are most likely to wage—not to take account of any conflict that can be subsumed under the rubric of total war.”<sup>72</sup> PLA doctrine since 1949 reflects this premise while simultaneously maintaining adherence to active defense. The initial “foundation of China's military thinking was based upon Mao's...concept of people's war.”<sup>73</sup> People's war dominated PLA doctrine during Mao's leadership tenure and for the brief interregnum following his death in 1976. During this period, the concept of people's war was largely shaped by the prevalent existential threat from the neighboring and militarily superior Soviet Union. In this context, people's war doctrine dictated that “the PLA would compensate for its technological inferiority with its abundant space, manpower, and time by ‘luring the enemy in deep’ and staying mobile.”<sup>74</sup> Ultimately, “this would allow China to gradually weaken the overextended invading forces, identify their weaknesses, reconstitute the resistance forces, and finally win the war through more decisive, strategic offensives.”<sup>75</sup> The basis for this initial articulation and iteration of PLA doctrine in the post-1949 era was singularly defense of the PRC's homeland.

In the wake of Mao's death, it became apparent that people's war would no longer suffice as the PLA's main functional doctrine due to global technological and logistic advancements in warfare. As a result, the late 1970s bore witness to an upgraded version

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<sup>72</sup> Joffe, *The Chinese Army after Mao*, 93.

<sup>73</sup> Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 11.

<sup>74</sup> Qinghong Wang, “Overview,” in Nan Li, Eric McVadon, and Qinghong Wang, *China's Evolving Military Doctrine, Issues and Insights*, Pacific Forum CSIS 6, no. 20 (December 2006), [http://www.csis.org/media/isis/pubs/issuesinsights\\_v06n20.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/isis/pubs/issuesinsights_v06n20.pdf) (accessed September 5, 2011), 1.

<sup>75</sup> Nan Li, “New Developments in PLAs Operational Doctrine and Strategies,” in Nan Li, Eric McVadon, and Qinghong Wang, *China's Evolving Military Doctrine, Issues and Insights*, Pacific Forum CSIS 6, no. 20 (December 2006), [http://www.csis.org/media/isis/pubs/issuesinsights\\_v06n20.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/isis/pubs/issuesinsights_v06n20.pdf) (accessed September 5, 2011), 5.



of people's war known as people's war under modern conditions.<sup>76</sup> This upgrade was significant because "the PLA's operational doctrine and strategies (underwent) modifications even though the assumption of a Soviet invasion of China had not changed."<sup>77</sup> This new doctrine continued to be based on a primarily defensive strategy but offered a key variation in that "rather than fighting a classic 'people's war' by drawing enemy forces into the interior of China, under 'people's war under modern conditions' the PLA now sought to defeat the adversary close to the border."<sup>78</sup> Though upgraded, this doctrinal shift continued to reflect the PLA's homeland defense- based core mission set.

A marked sea change in PLA doctrine shift came about in 1985 under the direction of the CCP's Central Military Commission. This shift was largely due to the PRC leadership's reassessment of the prevalent regional security threat, in that by 1985 the threat of a massive Soviet invasion had abated and it was assumed that future conflict would be concentrated on "local, limited war around China's periphery."<sup>79</sup> Though the advent of the local war doctrine represented a departure from previous doctrinal strategies, it remained fundamentally defensively oriented in that "local war was envisioned as a short, mid- to high- intensity conflict on China's borders or not far from the border region."<sup>80</sup>

The next steps in the PLA's doctrinal evolution were born largely in reaction to "the Gulf War (whereas) following that war, China's military strategists placed even greater emphasis on technology, modifying their depiction of future conflict from limited war to 'limited war under high-tech conditions'."<sup>81</sup> The most recent PLA doctrinal

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<sup>76</sup> Nan Li, "The PLA's Evolving Warfighting Doctrine, Strategy and Tactics, 1985-95: A Chinese Perspective," 443.

<sup>77</sup> Nan Li, "New Developments in PLAs Operational Doctrine and Strategies," 5.

<sup>78</sup> Nan Li, "The PLA's Evolving Warfighting Doctrine, Strategy and Tactics, 1985-95: A Chinese Perspective," 443.

<sup>79</sup> Paul H. B. Godwin, "From Continent to Periphery: PLA Doctrine, Strategy and Capabilities Towards 2000," *The China Quarterly* no. 146, Special Issue: China's Military in Transition (June, 1996): 464.

<sup>80</sup> Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 12.

<sup>81</sup> Godwin, "From Continent to Periphery: PLA Doctrine, Strategy and Capabilities Towards 2000," 473.

change has manifested as “‘local war under conditions of informationalization’ in the early twenty-first century.”<sup>82</sup> The common strand throughout the PLA’s doctrinal evolution since 1945 has been that all iterations are defensively based. The concept of defense has remained constant despite doctrinal adaptations to the prevalent threat or changing nature of conflict. This reinforces the notion that the PLA is and remains focused on the prevalent threat to the PRC’s territorial sovereignty. The following historical survey of PLA behavior since 1949 will indicate that in practical application the PRC invokes the use force in a manner consistent with its defense-centric doctrinal principles.

*a. Korea 1950–1953: Active Defense in Practice*

In the autumn of 1950, volunteer PLA soldiers crossed the Yalu River in support of North Korea marking the PRC’s entrance into the Korean War, a war “in the initiation of which the Chinese took no part, and in the waging of which they had no intention of participating.”<sup>83</sup> Still reeling from a protracted civil war, in those early days the nascent PRC was primarily focused internally and external military focus revolved largely on Taiwan. Regarding Korea, the PRC ostensibly supported their communist neighbor in a moral sense, yet not enough to dedicate resources that would require neglect of its fundamental internal focus.<sup>84</sup> Yet, the advancement of UN and U.S. troops into North Korea threatened the embryonic nation and prompted the PRC “to enter the Korean War reluctantly...because of the perceived long term threat that would be posed by the permanent stationing of U.S. forces in North Korea.”<sup>85</sup>

This dynamic forced the PLA to outline a military plan for Korea that would fundamentally defend the PRC from United States invasion and attack. Pursuant to this, the PLA was able to achieve early success and penetrate Seoul in early January 1951. Eventually United States forces were able to repel the PLA advance to the 38th

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<sup>82</sup> Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 12.

<sup>83</sup> Joffe, *The Chinese Army after Mao*, 4.

<sup>84</sup> Segal, *Defending China*, 95.

<sup>85</sup> Christensen, “Windows and War: Trend Analysis and Beijing’s Use of Force,” 54.

parallel where both sides remained entrenched until the June 1953 armistice. The PRC's intervention in Korea is significant because it is a definitive instance of the practical application of the PLA's core directive of active defense.<sup>86</sup> This was manifest when the PRC "intentionally took on a superior foe out of fear that (its) enemy's superiority would only grow, and the PRC's security would be further compromised if action were not taken."<sup>87</sup> As a result, the PLA's experience in Korea serves as an initial data point indicative of an enduring trend regarding the PRC's limited and defensively based use of force.

***b. India 1962: Setting a Precedent***

Analysis of the PRC's border conflict with India in 1962 indicates that it is clear the PRC engaged in kinetic warfare in the pursuit of defensive ends. This is because "Chinese objectives in the Sino-Indian War (were) overwhelmingly based on a perceived vulnerability to Indian territorial encroachments."<sup>88</sup> Providing backdrop to the conflict was the existential fact that in the early 1960s there was residual Sino-Indian tension regarding longstanding border disputes. Exacerbating this festering problem set was India's 1961 discovery of a PRC-constructed road connecting Xinjiang to Tibet in the disputed Aksai Chin region. Following this discovery, from late 1961 until the fall of 1962, both nations conducted probe-like military maneuvers in the region while simultaneously engaging in superficial diplomatic theater.<sup>89</sup> The crisis culminated when "the PLA conducted two offensive campaigns, and in late November (1962) Beijing declared a unilateral ceasefire and drew back to the territory it had controlled before the outbreak of hostilities."<sup>90</sup>

The Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 set a distinct precedent in that:

China's use of force was...clearly more defensive and political than it was rooted in a desire to expand Chinese territory, because China quickly and

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<sup>86</sup> Segal, *Defending China*, 94–96.

<sup>87</sup> Christensen, "Windows and War: Trend Analysis and Beijing's Use of Force," 55.

<sup>88</sup> Segal, *Defending China*, 142.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 141–142.

<sup>90</sup> Godwin, "Change and Continuity in Chinese Military Doctrine, 1949–1999," 34.

unilaterally ceded much of the territory that the PLA gained in its utter rout of Indian forces on the latter's side of the Sino-Indian border's line of control.<sup>91</sup>

As a result, the Sino-Indian conflict functions as a touchstone case of defensively oriented non-expansionist PRC military behavior.

*c. Russia 1969: The Trend Continues*

The PRC-Soviet relationship of the early-to-mid 1950s was largely amicable in that it could be effectively described as a semi-symbiotic relationship highlighted by a shared ideology and a 1950 defense treaty. However, the bi-lateral dynamic began to deteriorate in the late 1950s largely due to the concert of Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign, the subsequent Soviet withdrawal of aid and the PRC's increasing discontent with legacy treaties and their attendant border demarcations. By 1969 as both armies had garrisoned hundreds of thousands of troops along the disputed border regions.<sup>92</sup>

The PRC's threat perception of the Soviet Union escalated as a result of the Soviet Union's 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev's concurrent proclamation of his signature doctrine indicating the Soviet Union's "prerogative to intervene in 'socialist' states to defend socialism from either domestic or foreign threats."<sup>93</sup> This dynamic sparked a March 1969 PLA assault of Soviet forces in the disputed border region followed by a brief conflict on Zhenbaodao (Damansky) Island on the Ussuri River. At the time of this conflict, the concert of a deteriorating bi-lateral relationship and the decade-long build-up of Soviet forces were probably interpreted by the PRC as "the precursor of an eventual Soviet attack."<sup>94</sup> Therefore, by initiating kinetic action in its tenuous border region the PRC was ultimately keeping with its overarching defensively based military posture.

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<sup>91</sup> Christensen, "Windows and War: Trend Analysis and Beijing's Use of Force," 66.

<sup>92</sup> Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: The North Carolina University Press, 2001), 240.

<sup>93</sup> Godwin, "Change and Continuity in Chinese Military Doctrine, 1949–1999," 35.

<sup>94</sup> Christensen, "Windows and War: Trend Analysis and Beijing's Use of Force," 69.

*d. Vietnam 1979: Same Story, Different Decade*

The PRC's invasion of "Vietnam in 1979 was the sole major combat operation in the 1970's and remains the last significant PLA operational experience."<sup>95</sup> For the PRC, the regional threat environment of the late 1970s had solidified around the Soviet Union to the north and Vietnam to the south. This dynamic was exacerbated in during the 1977-78 Cambodia-Vietnam conflict which resulted in the PRC's siding with Cambodia. The situation escalated in late December 1978 as a result of Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia. In response, "on 17 February 1979...the PLA initiated a 'self-defense counterattack' to 'teach Vietnam a lesson' (and by) mid-March, Beijing announced it had achieved the objectives of its 'punitive' invasion and withdrew PLA forces back to China."<sup>96</sup>

PRC use of force in Vietnam was predicated upon checking Vietnam's regional aggression. The most tangible element of this objective was the obvious deterrent factor the PRC's invasion of Vietnam would have in preventing any Vietnamese invasion of PRC proper. More abstractly, this objective was in line with the broader regional security context facing the PRC in that "by attacking Moscow's key Asian ally...(and) attempting to raise the cost of Vietnam's Cambodian adventure and perhaps save (Cambodian leader) Pol Pot...Beijing could hope to prove its own mettle and cast doubt on the meaning of Soviet power."<sup>97</sup> Though the tactical success of the invasion was questionable, Vietnamese forces never seriously threatened PRC territory.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, the PRC's swift withdrawal is also consistent with its previous, non-expansionist behavior and reinforces its defensively-based military proclivities. In keeping with its defense-centric trend, the Vietnamese experience in 1979 functions as

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<sup>95</sup> Ryan, Finkelstein, and McDevitt, "Introduction: Patterns of PLA Warfighting," 17.

<sup>96</sup> Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 4.

<sup>97</sup> Segal, *Defending China*, 215–216.

<sup>98</sup> Segal, *Defending China*, 211–213; Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 4.

the last kinetic instance “since 1949, (that) the PLA...successfully deterred surrounding powers from invading China proper, fighting in China proper, or engaging in hostilities too near the Chinese periphery.”<sup>99</sup>

## **2. The PLAN within the PLA’s Defense Paradigm**

Since 1949, the PLAN has functioned as a complementary subordinate within the overarching, defensively-based mission profile of the PLA. The PLAN was officially established in May 1950 and throughout the 1950s the nascent PLAN’s core charge was to oppose the naval threat emanating from Taiwan.<sup>100</sup> This dynamic was complicated by the eventual concert of “the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, the military’s budgetary focus on aircraft and nuclear weapons, and the loss of technical assistance from the Soviet Union following the Sino-Soviet split.”<sup>101</sup> This confluence besought adverse developmental effects on the PLAN that characterized its existence until its recent modernization.

The PLAN’s initial doctrinal charge was known as coastal defense, a strategy that dovetailed with the prevalent Soviet threat-based PLA doctrine of people’s war in that coastal defense “focused the PLAN on defending China’s coast from the Soviet Pacific Fleet as a small component of what would primarily be a land war.”<sup>102</sup> By the early 1980s, PLAN leader Admiral Liu Huaqing advocated a doctrinal shift toward a strategy of offshore defense. The PLAN’s eventual adoption of this doctrinal shift “paralleled the CMC’s adoption of a new military strategy that focused on local wars on China’s periphery instead of one based on a major...confrontation with the Soviet Union.”<sup>103</sup> Admiral Liu’s change promoted the limited expansion of the PLAN’s defensive perimeter to the first island chain, roughly delineated as the Kurile Islands, Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines. Liu’s broadly defined offshore defense doctrine continues to

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<sup>99</sup> Ryan, Finkelstein, and McDevitt, “Introduction: Patterns of PLA Warfighting,” 19.

<sup>100</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 7–8.

<sup>101</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, “The People’s Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics,” 4.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

function as the core doctrinal guidance for the PLAN.<sup>104</sup> However, the advent and influence of the broader PLA doctrine of “‘local wars under modern high-tech conditions’ (has) many Chinese scholars and PLAN strategists now (advocating) a new strategy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century termed ‘distant sea defense’ (which does) not bound operations geographically, but rather...according to China’s maritime needs.”<sup>105</sup>

The evolution of PLAN doctrine is consistent with the broader, defensively-oriented evolution of PLA doctrine writ large. Also consistent with broader PLA employment is the fact that the PRC “has not hesitated to employ naval force in pursuit of national security goals (and) typically has employed naval force over issues of sovereignty concerning specific islands and provinces.”<sup>106</sup> As an illustration of this dynamic, the 1974 Xisha (Paracel) Islands conflict functions as a key exemplar of the PLAN’s complementary mission within the broader defensively-based machinations of the PLA.

**a.      *The PLAN in Action: Xisha (Paracel) Islands 1974***

In keeping with its established, territorial sovereignty-defense based motivations for its use of force, “(the PRC’s) seizure of the Xisha (Paracel) Islands in January 1974 was ostensibly merely a natural reassertion of control over Chinese territory.”<sup>107</sup> This was due to the fact that the PRC considered the Xisha (Paracel) Islands sovereign territory. The situation reached its climax in January 1974 following several months of intensified regional disputes stemming from the South Vietnamese government’s 1973 awarding of oil concessions in the region. Following intermittent though intensifying early January skirmishes between PLAN and South Vietnamese forces in the Xisha Archipelago, the PLAN was ultimately able to sink Vietnamese naval

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<sup>104</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 174–178.

<sup>105</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, “The People’s Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics,” 6.

<sup>106</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 18.

<sup>107</sup> Segal, *Defending China*, 197.

forces and conduct amphibious operations that ultimately resulted in the occupation and reinforcement of Jinyin and Shanhu Islands.<sup>108</sup>

Although a relatively minor operation, the 1974 Xisha (Paracel) Islands conflict functions as a key incident of kinetic PLAN action and as a signature data point regarding the PLAN's role within the PRC's security apparatus. In a favorable post-Vietnam War international context, the PLAN was utilized in a limited manner so as "to compel others to accept its definition of Chinese territory."<sup>109</sup> This employment is consistent with historical PLA behavior writ large and is indicative of the enduring dynamic in which the PLAN functions as a subordinate, complementary and compliant module within the broader defensive and territorial sovereignty threat-oriented PRC military construct.

## **B. THE MODERN SECURITY PARADIGM: SLOC DEFENSE VS. TAIWAN**

As previous sections have articulated, for the bulk of its existence since 1949 the PRC's defensively based military strategies were conceived on major confrontation between the PRC and the Soviet Union. However, this paradigm began to migrate "in December 1978 at the Third Plenum meeting of the 11<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP...(when) Deng Xiaoping formally adopted a shift in national strategy to the development of the economy."<sup>110</sup> This shift launched the PRC's "commitment to achieving the 'Four Modernizations' of 'agriculture, industry, science and technology and national defense' (as) a foundation for the (new) period of reform."<sup>111</sup> As a result of being "listed last among the 'Four Modernizations', the subordination of (the) military...to national economic development was a consistent theme (within the PRC) throughout the 1980's and 1990's."<sup>112</sup> The dynamic of a limited regional threat environment endures until the present and has been so acknowledged by the PRC in its

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 197–199.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>110</sup> Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 4.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 5.



2010 white paper on national defense in stating that “the Asia-Pacific security situation is generally stable.”<sup>113</sup> Therefore, the PRC’s contemporary security context is largely driven by domestic political and economic concerns.

Central to this security dynamic is the contemporary CCP’s obsession with perpetuating its absolute authority. This core tenet of CCP survivability pervades the PRC’s contemporary security context and is primarily manifest in both economic and sovereignty-centric platforms—the most salient of which are the factors of SLOC defense and Taiwan respectively.

As it pertains to the overarching precept of regime survivability, the CCP puts a premium on sustaining the PRC’s exponential economic growth. As a result, the CCP figures it must perpetuate economic growth “at an annual rate of 7 percent or more in order to create a certain number of jobs and keep unemployment rates at levels that will prevent widespread labor unrest (and) these explicit growth...targets remain in the minds of all Chinese officials as they create foreign as well as domestic policies.”<sup>114</sup> This dynamic extends to the PRC’s security realm primarily in the form of sustaining energy access as “the country’s oil use and oil import dependence have been rising rapidly since China became a net oil importer in 1993.”<sup>115</sup> As a result, access to oil resources has become critical to the CCP—and by extension PRC—security calculus. Due to this, the PRC’s “SLOCs connecting China to the (oil rich) Middle East and Africa have assumed a...vital role as a major ‘center of gravity’ for Chinese economic development.”<sup>116</sup> This has engendered the prevalent security based assumption that SLOC defense will become a significant mission set for the PLAN. Therefore, in the contemporary context the concept of SLOC defense functions as a significant security problem set for the PLA.

Competing with the PRC’s budding economically-based mission of SLOC defense is the more traditional, sovereignty-based security complication that is Taiwan.

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<sup>113</sup> The People’s Republic of China Information Office of the State Council, *China’s National Defense in 2010*, (March 2011): 3.

<sup>114</sup> Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower*, 55.

<sup>115</sup> Erickson and Goldstein, “Gunboats for China’s New ‘Grand Canals’? Probing the Intersection of Beijing’s Naval and Oil Security Policies,” 45.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

The issue of Taiwan is intrinsically tied to the omnipresent specter of CCP survivability in that “it is widely believed in China and abroad that if the Communist regime allows Taiwan to declare formal independence without putting up a fight, the outraged public will bring down the regime.”<sup>117</sup> Compounding the Taiwan issue is the external factor of the United States. Historical precedent and existential legislation have all but assured United States intervention in a Taiwan conflict. Consequently, the convergence of its inherent sovereignty-centric importance to CCP survivability and its complicating external factor of absolute United States interference makes Taiwan the most exigent security issue facing the contemporary PRC. This dynamic is consistent with the PRC-PLA’s established defensively oriented and threat based model. In light of this reality, in the PRC’s modern security paradigm SLOC defense functions as a secondary, tangential and successive mission to that of Taiwan.

### **1. Taiwan: The Center of Gravity**

This chapter’s previous section delineated that the prevalent threat to the PRC’s territorial sovereignty has historically driven its existential security calculus. This dynamic, though slightly nuanced, holds in the contemporary context because “the roots of the Chinese fixation on Taiwan are purely domestic (and) related to regime security.”<sup>118</sup> Within this security context, the prevalent threat is functionally political in that the Taiwan issue directly impacts CCP survivability. Thus, for the PRC the Taiwan issue is unique because it diverges from past contexts surrounding the PRC’s use of force while remaining predicated on its well established premise of the defense of territorial sovereignty.

The fact that Taiwan functions as a nuanced divergence from prior motivations for PRC use of force does not dampen its prominence in the PRC’s current security landscape. This is largely due to the fact that the PRC “public cares intensely about Taiwan because the CCP has taught it to care—in school textbooks and the media.”<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower*, 2.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

This self-inflicted propagation has both deepened and exacerbated the “connection between the Taiwan issue and the survival of Communist Party rule.”<sup>120</sup> This significant dynamic is compounded by the existential fact that the Taiwan issue is also subject to the amplifying specter of the United States. The addition of this factor elevates the Taiwan issue from one of a potentially manageable domestic political issue to primary status within the PRC’s modern security paradigm.

*a. Taiwan and the United States Factor*

United States involvement in the Taiwan situation is not a new phenomenon. Overt United States military involvement dates back to the Korean War when the United States Navy’s Seventh Fleet was dispatched to deter PRC aggression toward the island. United States support of Taiwan was then reinforced in December 1954 upon the signing of a mutual defense pact. This bi-lateral relationship endured until the United States severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan and subsequently opened official diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1979, ultimately setting the stage for the modern United States dynamic within the PRC-Taiwan stalemate.

In the current cross-Strait context, a central element is the existence of:

An American law called the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) of 1979 (which requires) the president to view any Chinese use of force against Taiwan as a ‘threat to peace and security’ of the region and to consult with Congress on how to react.<sup>121</sup>

The TRA is “not a formal defense treaty (and) it does not pledge the United States to a specific course of action if hostilities break out with the PRC (however) the TRA represents a strong American political commitment to Taiwan.”<sup>122</sup>

The practical application of this dynamic was manifest during the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995–1996 when “China conducted military exercises and live missile firings in the Taiwan Strait as a response to the increasingly pro-independence stance of

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 185.

Taiwan's President, Lee Teng-hui.”<sup>123</sup> In reaction, the United States deployed “two aircraft carrier groups into the island's vicinity...(and ultimately) conveyed its resolve to defend Taiwan against aggression from the mainland.”<sup>124</sup> The concert of this precedent and existential United States legislation regarding Taiwan's security informs the PRC realization that they must develop the capability to discourage United States intervention should Taiwan's re-integration become vital to regime survival. This dynamic has become the defining element of the PRC's contemporary security calculus.

The Taiwan issue will continue to define the PRC security context as long as the CCP considers it the most exigent political-military threat to regime survival. The CCP also regards the PRC's sustained economic growth—and by extension SLOC defense—as critical. However, due to Taiwan's prominence within the PRC's current security context SLOC defense functions as a “comparatively secondary concern.”<sup>125</sup> As a result, the PRC has undertaken alternative security measures to mitigate the SLOC mission while the PRC's main security focal point remains trained on Taiwan.

## **2. SLOC Defense: Defining the Mission**

As was previously outlined, the PRC's access to overseas oil is vital to both the sustainment of economic growth and the perpetuation of CCP rule. This provides rationale for the phenomena that the PRC's “demand for crude oil doubled between 1995 and 2005, and will double again in the coming decade or two, as it imports 7.3 million barrels of crude daily by 2020.”<sup>126</sup> Further amplifying the PRC's growing appetite for energy resources is “a (2010) report from the Paris-based International Energy Agency (which) stated that China had become the world's number-one energy consumer, surpassing the United States.”<sup>127</sup> Due to this increased reliance on energy imports it is estimated that approximately 40 percent of PRC oil imports come via the maritime

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<sup>123</sup> Pradun, “From Bottle Rockets to Lightning Bolts: China's Missile Revolution and PLA Strategy Against U.S. Military Intervention,” 7.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*, 290.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>127</sup> Lin, “The New Silk Road: China's Energy Strategy in the Greater Middle East,” 3.

domain.<sup>128</sup> Compounding this reality is the PRC's "'Malacca Dilemma' (as) currently 80 percent of its oil imports pass through the Strait of Malacca."<sup>129</sup>

This dynamic has engendered the primal impetus for the PRC's SLOC defense paradigm. As a result, PRC analysts are touting the importance of developing power projection type military capabilities to secure the PRC's SLOCs.<sup>130</sup> However, the reality is that SLOC defense exists as a tangential and subordinate mission to that of Taiwan. This is due in large part to the fact that the current cross-Strait dynamic is fairly stable,<sup>131</sup> and the PRC's SLOCs are subject to "the global freedom of navigation provided by the U.S. Navy...and it is arguably still in China's interest to 'free ride' on this 'public good' for the foreseeable future."<sup>132</sup> In light of this favorable international context it is rational that the PRC prefers not to invest heavily in military forces dedicated to the mission of SLOC defense. Therefore, the SLOC defense mission is subject to reduced status in the PRC's contemporary security context which forces the PRC to pursue alternative methods to achieve sustained energy security. This alternate "strategy centers on establishing Chinese footholds with military or geopolitical influence along the Indian Ocean littoral and into the Persian Gulf and Mediterranean—a 'string of pearls'."<sup>133</sup>

*a. SLOC Defense's Mitigating Strategy: The String of Pearls*

In order to mitigate its reluctance to dedicate significant military assets to the SLOC protection mission, the PRC has undertaken multiple endeavors to initiate strategic SLOC presence. This phenomenon is known as the string of pearls and consists primarily of a two-pronged strategy consisting of largely non-military SLOC wide

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<sup>128</sup> Erickson and Collins, "China's Oil Security Pipe Dream: The Reality, and Strategic Consequences, of Seaborne Imports," 90.

<sup>129</sup> Lin, "The New Silk Road: China's Energy Strategy in the Greater Middle East," 4.

<sup>130</sup> Erickson and Goldstein, "Gunboats for China's New 'Grand Canals'? Probing the Intersection of Beijing's Naval and Oil Security Policies," 43.

<sup>131</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2011*, 14.

<sup>132</sup> James Mulvenon, "Dilemma's and Imperatives of Beijing's Strategic Energy Dependence: The PLA Perspective," in *China's Energy Strategy: The Impact on Beijing's Maritime Policies*, eds. Gabriel B. Collins, Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and William S. Murray (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>133</sup> Lin, "The New Silk Road: China's Energy Strategy in the Greater Middle East," xi.

transportation infrastructure projects and the nurturing of PRC diplomatic relations.<sup>134</sup> Though “the term is based more on inferences U.S. observers have drawn from Chinese activities in the region than on a coherent national strategy codified in Chinese doctrine, strategic commentary, or official statements;”<sup>135</sup> it is evident that a PRC pattern centered on the procurement of energy resources is developing along the SLOCs. This is due to the fact that key components of the string of pearls include:

The construction of a large port and listening post at the Pakistani port of Gwadar on the Arabian Sea...at Hambantota on the southern coast of Sri Lanka the Chinese seem to be building the oil-age equivalent of a coaling station for their ships, at the Bangladeshi port of Chittagong on the Bay of Bengal Chinese companies have been active in developing the container port facility (and) in Burma, (where) Beijing is building and upgrading commercial and naval bases (and) constructing road, waterway, and pipeline links from the Bay of Bengal to China’s Yunnan Province.<sup>136</sup>

Given the fact that the PRC’s near-term SLOC access is likely assured due to the prevailing geo-political climate, the PRC’s overarching goal in implementing this largely non-military based alternative strategy is initiate a forward SLOC presence so as to alleviate immediate pressure on the PLA and PLAN.

Augmenting the maritime-centric string of pearls, the PRC has also established and is growing its significant overland energy procurement infrastructure. Pursuant to this, in addition to an existential pipeline from Kazakhstan, “in January 2011 a 300,000 b/d spur pipeline from Siberia to Daqing began delivering crude to China (and) China also commenced construction on a pipeline designed to transport crude oil and natural gas from Kyaukpaya, Burma to Kunming, China.”<sup>137</sup> The goal of these endeavors is to further mitigate the PRC’s SLOC defense paradigm by “building additional lines to

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<sup>134</sup> Pehrson, “String of Pearls: Meeting the Challenge of China’s Rising Power across the Asian Littoral,” 3.

<sup>135</sup> James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, “China’s Naval Ambitions in the Indian Ocean,” in *China’s Energy Strategy: The Impact on Beijing’s Maritime Policies*, eds. Gabriel B. Collins, Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and William S. Murray (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 125.

<sup>136</sup> Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*, 10.

<sup>137</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China, 2011*, 20.

‘bypass’ the Malacca Strait.”<sup>138</sup> Concurrently, the PRC has also pursued additional non-maritime energy access objectives such as using the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to establish a foothold in certain central Asian regions.<sup>139</sup> The concert of the PRC’s largely non-military string of pearls strategy and regional overland pipeline endeavors as an alternate means of mitigating its SLOC defense mission serves as a data point further indicative of Taiwan’s pre-eminence within the PRC’s modern security paradigm.

## C. CONCLUSION

This chapter has served to outline an enduring behavioral model for PRC use of force since 1949. In this context, the PLA—and the PLAN as its subordinate service—has historically and continues to be defensively-based and oriented toward the prevalent threat to PRC territorial sovereignty. This chapter has also served to articulate the PRC’s contemporary security context, one in which the threat of the United States in a Taiwan re-integration conflict functions as the dominant theme. The confluence of these conclusions would logically yield that the modern PLAN is characterized as an established defensively-oriented naval force primarily focused on the United States as the main adversarial party in a Taiwan conflict. The next chapter aims to confirm this assessment by surveying the PLAN’s modernization.

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<sup>138</sup> Erickson and Collins, “China’s Oil Security Pipe Dream: The Reality, and Strategic Consequences, of Seaborne Imports,” 90.

<sup>139</sup> Lin, “The New Silk Road: China’s Energy Strategy in the Greater Middle East,” 6.

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### III. THE MODERN PLAN: TARGET USA

As the previous chapter argued, the PRC's contemporary security context is principally defined by the Taiwan issue and the United States' role in such a scenario. As a result, the thrust of the modern PLA has been centered on the development of a force capable of reasonably countering United States military forces. Pursuant to this, the PRC's

approach to this challenge (has) manifested in a sustained effort to develop the capability to attack, at long ranges, (United States) military forces that might deploy or operate within the western Pacific (characterized) as 'anti-access' and 'area denial' (A2AD) capabilities.<sup>140</sup>

Due to the intrinsic value of a robust naval force within this strategy and the precedent of United States naval intervention during the 1995–96 Taiwan Strait crises, the PLAN has enjoyed a marked increase in PRC attention and funds over the last two decades.<sup>141</sup>

The A2AD paradigm has engendered the PLA's recognition of two central operational complications with which the PLAN's modernization must contend. The first is the broader acknowledgement that the:

U.S. armed forces are the leaders in incorporating advanced technologies into military operations and have (historically) applied these operations in war (reinforcing that) the principal adversary the PLA will potentially confront in an 'informationalized' war is the United States.<sup>142</sup>

Integral to this broader reality is the second operational problem set in which "Chinese analysts and strategists consider aircraft carriers as the center of gravity of the U.S. potential for interceding in a Taiwan scenario."<sup>143</sup> As a result, the two dominant themes

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<sup>140</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2011*, 28.

<sup>141</sup> Bernard D. Cole, "The Energy Factor in Chinese Maritime Strategy," in *China's Energy Strategy: The Impact on Beijing's Maritime Policies*, eds. Gabriel B. Collins, Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and William S. Murray (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 341.

<sup>142</sup> Paul H. B. Godwin, "China's Emerging Military Doctrine: A Role for Nuclear Submarines?" in *China's Future Nuclear Submarine Force*, eds. Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, William S. Murray, and Andrew R. Wilson (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 45.

<sup>143</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 148.

within the PLAN's contemporary modernization have been "seeking the initiative within the concept of informationalization to counter potential U.S. participation in a western Pacific conflict (and) preventing effective (U.S.) carrier operations."<sup>144</sup> These thematic strands have come to define the A2AD mission set and subsequently permeate all aspects of the modern PLAN.

This chapter surveys the modern PLAN and identifies how its modernization is oriented toward these themes and countering the United States military threat within the context of Taiwan's re-integration. It is divided into three main sections. The first section surveys the contemporary PLAN's equipment status to include sub-sections devoted to the traditional naval warfare paradigms of surface, subsurface and air warfare. The next section is dedicated to the modern PLAN's personnel establishment. The final section reviews the PLAN's recent training and operational trends. The aggregate of this approach serves to indicate the predominant influence of the A2AD model and countering the United States as an impetus for modern PLAN development.

#### **A. THE MODERN PLAN: EQUIPMENT AND HARDWARE**

Over the last two decades, in pursuit of a force capable of A2AD operations the PLAN has undertaken a force modernization characterized by both foreign acquisition (typically from Russia) and advances in organic capability production. The central materiel focus of the PLAN's wholesale modernization has been "ensuring the capability of China's submarine force to serve as a primary military instrument in the event of a security confrontation with the United States over Taiwan's status."<sup>145</sup> This submarine-centric development has been augmented by significant upgrades to the PLAN's anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM) and anti-ship cruise missile (ASCM) capabilities, surface force air defense, and naval aviation.<sup>146</sup> However, despite this marked materiel transformation the PLAN remains limited in its development and acquisition of force projection

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>146</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, "The People's Liberation Army-Navy," 16–30.

capability. As a result, the modern PLAN's materiel acquisitions and deployment reinforce its defensively-based focus on countering the United States threat vis-à-vis Taiwan.

### **1. The Modern PLAN Submarine Force**

As previously indicated, a key theme within the PLAN's modern archetype is developing the ability to counter United States aircraft carriers and it is apparent that the PLAN diesel submarine force has been molded to satisfy that mission set. The PLAN's main instrument to accomplish this mission is its twelve unit Russian-constructed Kilo class submarine inventory and the majority of the arsenal's possession of the SS-N-27B Klub-s supersonic ASCM.<sup>147</sup> This element is important because the SS-N-27B has been attributed with the ability "to defeat the U.S. Aegis air- and missile-defense system that is central to the defense of carrier strike groups."<sup>148</sup> Due to their inherent applicability in a Taiwan scenario, the acquisition of the Kilos functions as a key data point indicative of the PLAN's primary focus on the A2AD counter-United States mission set.

Augmenting the Kilo within the PLAN's modern diesel submarine arsenal are the indigenously constructed Song class boats.<sup>149</sup> Though less capable than the Kilos, the Songs can be outfitted with the indigenous YJ-82 (C-802) ASCM.<sup>150</sup> The YJ-82/C-802 ASCM has proven capable in combat as demonstrated "by Hezbollah fighters wielding (the weapon) against Israeli naval vessel INS Hanit on 14 July 2006."<sup>151</sup> Rounding out the PLAN's modern diesel submarine force is the Yuan class submarine. The Yuan class can also hold the YJ-82 ASCM and "may also be fitted with an (air-independent

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<sup>147</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 96.

<sup>148</sup> Eric A. McVadon, "China's Navy Today: Looking Toward Blue Water," in *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective*, eds. Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein and Carnes Lord (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 382.

<sup>149</sup> William S. Murray, "An Overview of the PLAN Submarine Force," in *China's Future Nuclear Submarine Force*, eds. Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, William S. Murray and Andrew R. Wilson (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 60.

<sup>150</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2011*, 4.

<sup>151</sup> James Bussert, "China's Surface Combatants and the New SLOC Defense Imperative," in *China's Energy Strategy: The Impact on Beijing's Maritime Policies*, eds. Gabriel B. Collins, Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and William S. Murray (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 356.

propulsion) AIP system, which enables a diesel submarine to operate for significantly longer periods of time without surfacing to recharge its batteries.”<sup>152</sup> The capabilities of the Song and Yuan offer significant supplemental depth to the Kilo force further highlighting the importance and centrality of diesel submarines toward the modern PLAN mission paradigm.

In addition to the diesel submarine force “the PLAN has two active building programs to replace its six old nuclear powered submarines, the Xia-class SSBN and five Han-class SSNs.”<sup>153</sup> This has included the construction of two Shang class SSNs that along with the Song and Yuan will ultimately be able to employ the extended range CH-SS-NX-13 ASCM.<sup>154</sup> Concurrently, the PLAN “is also developing a near-continuous at-sea strategic deterrent with the Jin SSBN program (which will feature) the new JL-2 submarine launched ballistic missile...capable of reaching the continental United States from Chinese littorals.”<sup>155</sup> Though in its nascent stages of development, the existence of this program is significant because once complete it will mark the initial PLAN capability to legitimately threaten the United States strategically.<sup>156</sup> As a result, the Jin SSBN program is applicable to the PLAN’s modern A2AD mission profile in that “this SLBM force (will allow) Beijing to act more confidently in bold undertakings vis-à-vis the United States, knowing that its strategic forces are appropriately redundant and more secure.”<sup>157</sup>

There is an existential argument that the PLAN’s submarine force could also function as a legitimate SLOC defense mechanism. However, the inherent nature of submarines limits their utility within the PRC’s SLOC protection mission as “SLOCs are best preserved with a visible display of military power and the tactical advantages

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<sup>152</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, “The People’s Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics,” 23.

<sup>153</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 96.

<sup>154</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China*, 2011, 4.

<sup>155</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, “The People’s Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics,” 23.

<sup>156</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 153.

<sup>157</sup> McVadon, “China’s Navy Today: Looking Toward Blue Water,” 382–383.

enjoyed by surface combatants.”<sup>158</sup> This observation is accurate and accordingly the next section will outline the PLAN’s modern surface force. Yet, this analysis will yield that the architecture of its surface force modernization is more conducive to the counter-United States A2AD paradigm which has pervaded the PLAN’s sub-surface force modernization.

## **2. The Modern PLAN Surface Force**

The PLAN’s modernization has engendered a robust and capable surface force. Consistent within this development is the A2AD-centric “standard of relying on ASCMs as PLAN warships’ main armament.”<sup>159</sup> Complementing this trend are marked improvements to the surface force area-air defense (AAD) capabilities.<sup>160</sup> The signature foreign acquisitions and recent indigenous production within these two strands of surface force development indicate that Taiwan’s A2AD counter-U.S. element also drives the materiel focus of the PLAN’s modern surface fleet.

Central to this paradigm is the PLAN’s signature surface combatant: the Sovremenny-class guided-missile destroyer (DDG). The PLAN acquired four of these warships from Russia in the period between 1999 and 2006.<sup>161</sup> A key characteristic of the Sovremenny is that “the Soviet Union designed the ship in the early 1970’s specifically to counter U.S. carriers and escorts equipped with high-tech air defenses.”<sup>162</sup> As a result, the PLAN Sovremennys “each (carry) eight SS-N-22 ‘Sunburn’ sea-skimming anti-ship missiles...designed specifically to penetrate the defenses of U.S. Navy Aegis destroyers and aircraft carrier battle groups.”<sup>163</sup> The Sovremenny’s ASCM armament is significant because “to date, the U.S. Navy has been unable to develop

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<sup>158</sup> Bray, “Turning to the Sea...This Time to Stay,” 169.

<sup>159</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 99.

<sup>160</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, “The People’s Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics,” 18.

<sup>161</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 98.

<sup>162</sup> Holmes and Yoshihara, *Chinese Naval Strategy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Turn to Mahan*, 96.

<sup>163</sup> Shambaugh, “China’s Military Modernization,” 92.

effective countermeasures against the Sunburn.”<sup>164</sup> The PLAN’s emphasis on the Sovremenny functions as the core data point indicative of surface force focus on countering the United States in a conflict over Taiwan.

Augmenting the PLAN’s Sovremenny fleet are the indigenously produced Luzhou-class and Luyang II- class DDGs.<sup>165</sup> Touted as its signature capability, the Luzhou possesses “a formidable anti-air warfare (AAW) system (that) is built around the Russian SA-N-20 Rif-M missile, the naval version of the S-300 (and offers) an 81-nm range.”<sup>166</sup> Additionally, the Luzhou is configured “for operations in a modern electromagnetic environment (as) the ship is equipped with chaff/decoy launchers and has active electronic countermeasures (ECM) capability.”<sup>167</sup> The Luyang II also boasts an advanced air-defense capability as it is “fitted with the indigenous HHQ-9 long-range surface to air missile.”<sup>168</sup> This robust system was originally designed to “emulate the U.S. Patriot system (and) has a range of 54-nm.”<sup>169</sup> The advent of these surface units reinforces the PLAN’s materiel commitment to the A2AD model in that they compensate for the Sovremennys’ inherent “weaknesses in AAW”<sup>170</sup> and offer “improving ECM and information warfare (IW) capabilities further (suggesting) a plan to engage and disrupt U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups in a Taiwan conflict.”<sup>171</sup>

Though the modern PLAN’s surface combatant architecture is fundamentally influenced by the counter-United States A2AD paradigm, its capabilities could potentially extend to a SLOC defense mission as well. However, the paucity of a crucial logistic element within the PLAN surface force precludes legitimate execution of the latter. Due to the sheer distances inherent in the SLOC defense mission, successful

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<sup>164</sup> Holmes and Yoshihara, *Chinese Naval Strategy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Turn to Mahan*, 96.

<sup>165</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China*, 2011, 4

<sup>166</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 100.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>168</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China*, 2010, 3.

<sup>169</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 102.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>171</sup> Shambaugh, *Modernizing China’s Military: Progress, Problems and Prospects*, 283.

execution necessitates use of replenishment at sea (RAS) vessels that carry “a full variety of fuel, food, and ammunition in one hull with multi-highline RAS stations on each side.”<sup>172</sup> Currently, the PLAN only possesses three ships capable of this mission,<sup>173</sup> and among these the PLAN “has added just two...the Fuchi class, since 2000.”<sup>174</sup> As a result, PLAN A2AD-centric surface combatant acquisition has outpaced that of its RAS-capable counterparts serving as an additional data point that PLAN focus remains on Taiwan as logistic consideration for maintaining a robust the SLOC defense mission capability has not progressed past nascent stages.

A modicum of the PLAN’s modernization “has been directed at modernizing the amphibious force, but not at significantly expanding its capacity: the PLAN is still limited to transporting approximately one mechanized division of fully equipped troops.”<sup>175</sup> This phenomenon is likely due to the fact that amphibious operations are not integral to the counter-United States A2AD paradigm. Furthermore, PLAN leadership may appreciate that bolstering an amphibious lift capability vis-à-vis Taiwan would prove a fruitless endeavor considering Taiwan’s lack of assault-ready shoreline.<sup>176</sup> Regardless, the amphibious element of the PLAN’s surface modernization has been limited to the domestic production of the “Yuzhao-class vessel (which is) similar in design, size, and apparent capability to a U.S. San Antonio-class LPD.”<sup>177</sup> Though a marked modernization to the PLAN amphibious fleet, the ship’s addition does not significantly impact the PLAN’s amphibious lift capability nor enhance its A2AD functionality. This dynamic has engendered speculative commentary as to the Yuzhao’s utility in an extra-Taiwan capacity. This is certainly plausible; especially within the context of improving the PLAN’s humanitarian assistance-disaster relief (HADR) capability as the Yuzhao “offers a platform for humanitarian operations similar to the

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<sup>172</sup> Bussert, “China’s Surface Combatants and the New SLOC Defense Imperative,” in *China’s Energy Strategy: The Impact on Beijing’s Maritime Policies*, 361.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 95.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>176</sup> Bush and O’Hanlon, *A War Like No Other: The Truth about China’s Challenge to America*, 191.

<sup>177</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 106.

2004 post-tsunami...relief efforts that the United States has been able to conduct throughout the Asia-Pacific region.”<sup>178</sup> However, as it pertains to the PLAN’s extra-Taiwan mission of SLOC defense the utility of the Yuzhao within that paradigm is fairly limited and thus not a significant impetus for its construction.

### **3. The Modern PLAN Air Forces**

As it pertains to the PLAN’s organizational construct the PLAN Air Force (PLANAF) functions as the organic air component of the PLAN and is separate from the PLA Air Force. Central to the modern PLANAF is its fixed wing fighter force. The cornerstone of this modern air battery is the Su-30 MK2. The Su-30 MK2 features “both an extended range and maritime radar systems (allowing) the MK2 to strike enemy ships at long distances while still maintaining a robust air-to-air capability.”<sup>179</sup> These elements in conjunction with the fact that the Su-30 MK2 was initially designed to counter United States fighter aircraft brands the aircraft a particularly applicable platform within the PLAN’s counter-United States A2AD paradigm.<sup>180</sup> In keeping with this theme, the PLAN also utilizes the indigenous, but more limited J-8 fighter. The J-8 has a limited precedent within the counter-United States A2AD mission in that it was “the aircraft that collided with a U.S. Navy EP-3 reconnaissance aircraft in 2001.”<sup>181</sup> The PLANAF/PLAAF have also been developing a new strike-fighter known as the J-20 engendering speculation that “based on the aircraft’s size and design...it might be intended as a land-based strike aircraft for attacking ships at sea.”<sup>182</sup> Additionally, there is some evidence that the PLANAF is developing a cadre of carrier-based aircraft as the

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<sup>178</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 107.

<sup>179</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, “The People’s Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics,” 25.

<sup>180</sup> Shambaugh, *Modernizing China’s Military: Progress, Problems and Prospects*, 263.

<sup>181</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, “The People’s Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics,” 25.

<sup>182</sup> O’Rourke, “China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress,” 16.



PRC has reportedly “been in negotiations with Russia to purchase up to 50 Russian-made carrier capable Su-33 fighter aircraft and may be developing indigenous carrier-capable fighters.”<sup>183</sup>

The PLAN’s potential acquisition of aircraft carriers functions as the most contentious issue regarding the future direction of the force. This is because an aircraft carrier is perceived to be an “(instrument) of force projection, (although) Chinese military and government representatives have stated aircraft carriers are necessary for protecting China’s maritime territorial integrity.”<sup>184</sup> The PLAN’s pursuit of aircraft carriers has fallen into its similar model of acquisition for other naval platforms—a hybrid of foreign purchase and domestic development. Currently, the PLAN’s only carrier hull resides at Dalian shipyard and is that of a renovated Soviet Kuznetsov-class carrier that was acquired in 1998.<sup>185</sup> Recent press reporting indicates that this renovation may be reaching a culmination point as the carrier reportedly conducted initial limited sea trials in August 2011.<sup>186</sup> This in concert with the pre-natal development of the PLAN’s carrier-based aircraft force yields consensus that this carrier will likely be used in a development instead of operational capacity.<sup>187</sup> This dynamic is reinforced by “press statements by China’s military and defense-industrial establishment (indicating) that research and development for (domestic) carrier construction is underway.”<sup>188</sup> The aggregate of these developments indicates that the PLAN’s aircraft carrier program is in its extreme infancy.

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>184</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, “The People’s Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics,” 19.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Michael Wines, “China Begins Sea Trials of Its First Aircraft Carrier,” *The New York Times*, August 10, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/11/world/asia/11china.html?\\_r=2&ref=world](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/11/world/asia/11china.html?_r=2&ref=world), (accessed October 22, 2011).

<sup>187</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, “The People’s Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics,” 19. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China*, 2011, 3.

<sup>188</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, “The People’s Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics,” 19.

However, this does not restrain proliferation of speculation that the program is “probably the most commonly cited example of China’s desire to expand its naval power beyond Chinese coastal waters.”<sup>189</sup>

This phenomenon stems largely from analytical postulations that maintain PLAN “carrier battle groups will be unnecessary in a Taiwan Strait conflict (because) PLA warplanes can range over the island and adjacent waters from airfields on the mainland.”<sup>190</sup> The carrier power projection argument is further bolstered by claims that the PLAN requires “a carrier to provide air cover far out to sea...for the SLOC protection mission in the Indian Ocean.”<sup>191</sup> These analytical conclusions are flawed for multiple reasons. Regarding carriers vis-à-vis Taiwan, a carrier force could be used effectively in a dual role that would simultaneously hasten Taiwan’s capitulation and reinforce the PLAN A2AD mission. In threatening Taiwan proper, “a PLAN carrier force operating east of Taiwan could attack that island’s air defense forces on two fronts if the PLA were able to coordinate carrier-based attacks with shore-based attacks from the mainland.”<sup>192</sup> Within Taiwan’s A2AD paradigm, a carrier force would further enable the PLAN’s deterrent capacity in that it would possess an ability to conduct “a major fleet engagement in the Pacific against U.S. forces en route to relieve the island.”<sup>193</sup> A carrier force would be of limited use regarding PRC SLOC defense in that aircraft carriers do not provide the necessary escort-protection capabilities that surface combatants afford.<sup>194</sup> Additionally, effective deployment of a carrier force within the PRC SLOC defense paradigm would require a substantial upgrade to the PLAN’s menial afloat logistic force. If the PLAN’s nascent carrier program is being considered for any extra-Taiwan mission set it is likely that of a HADR-type as “the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami appears to have been a turning

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<sup>189</sup> Kostecka, “PLA Doctrine and the Employment of Sea-Based Airpower,” 12.

<sup>190</sup> Holmes and Yoshihara, *Chinese Naval Strategy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Turn to Mahan*, 96.

<sup>191</sup> Yung and Rustici with Kardon and Wiseman, “China’s Out of Area Naval Operations: Case Studies, Trajectories, Obstacles and Potential Solutions,” 46.

<sup>192</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 153.

<sup>193</sup> Holmes and Yoshihara, *Chinese Naval Strategy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Turn to Mahan*, 95.

<sup>194</sup> Bussert, “China’s Surface Combatants and the New SLOC Defense Imperative,” 354.

point in the Chinese leadership's support for an aircraft carrier."<sup>195</sup> The bottom line is that at this point the PLAN's carrier program does not represent a marked departure from the PLAN's materiel modernization focus on the counter-United States A2AD mission.

Though technically not a PLANAF asset, the PLA "is developing an anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM)...known as the DF-21D...intended to provide the PLA the capability to attack large ships, including aircraft carriers, in the western Pacific Ocean."<sup>196</sup> Reportedly, the DF-21D will have "the capability to perform a mid-course ballistic correction maneuver to update the target's location and then guide a Maneuvering Reentry Vehicle (MaRV) to the target (with) munitions designed to attack aircraft carrier sub-systems."<sup>197</sup> This ASBM development is significant because "the U.S. Navy has not previously faced a threat from highly accurate ballistic missiles capable of hitting moving ships at sea."<sup>198</sup> Thus, if the DF-21D proves to be an effective weapon it could represent a fundamental paradigm shift within the PLAN's A2AD dynamic in that its ability to neutralize United States carrier strike groups ostensibly eliminates the United States' key deterrent regarding the PRC's forcible re-integration of Taiwan. As a result, the advent of the DF-21D program arguably functions as the most prescient data point indicating that the PLAN's—and broader PLA's—primary impetus for materiel modernization is countering United States intervention in a Taiwan conflict.

## **B. THE MODERN PLAN PERSONNEL ESTABLISHMENT**

In a similar vein as its recent hardware upgrades, the architecture of the PLAN's modern personnel corps also reflects the force's primary counter-United States A2AD focus. This is primarily due to recent PLAN efforts aimed at accessing and retaining a personnel corps with the necessary technical skills to support modernization efforts

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<sup>195</sup> Michael A. Glosny, Philip C. Saunders and Robert S. Ross, "Debating China's Naval Nationalism," *International Security* 35, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 167.

<sup>196</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2011*, 3.

<sup>197</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, "The People's Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics," 26.

<sup>198</sup> O'Rourke, "China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities-Background and Issues for Congress," 8.

aimed at countering the technologically superior United States military. Additionally, the CCP assures PLAN loyalty by perpetuating a personnel system “aimed at ensuring constant CCP presence throughout the Navy chain of command.”<sup>199</sup> These dynamics indicate the PLAN personnel establishment’s “continued twin emphasis on ideological reliability and technical competence.”<sup>200</sup> These themes are propagated throughout the spectrum of the contemporary PLAN personnel establishment reinforcing Taiwan’s counter-United States paradigm as the core impetus for its broader modernization.

### **1. The Enlisted Force**

The PLAN’s personnel modernization has resulted in a fundamental re-structuring of its enlisted force. Central to this was the 1999 revision of the Military Service Law, which shifted obligated conscripted service to two years and increased the service length of non-commissioned officers (NCOs) to 20 years.<sup>201</sup> This revision was largely in response to increased retention difficulties as a result of the PRC’s burgeoning economy.<sup>202</sup> As a result, significant personnel efforts have been trained upon retaining a technically proficient NCO corps.<sup>203</sup> Pursuant to this, endeavors include re-alignment of the enlisted rank structure, accentuated NCO technical education, and the implementation of various pay incentives.<sup>204</sup> Concurrently, NCO selection has become increasingly competitive as applicants must “be recommended, evaluated and approved by their unit (and are subject to) a series of academic and physical tests.”<sup>205</sup> The initial yield of these efforts has been fruitful, for “since 1999, the PLAN has decreased the number of conscripts and increased the number of NCOs to approximately 40 percent of all PLAN

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<sup>199</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 61.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>201</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, “The People’s Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics,” 31.

<sup>202</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 124.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>205</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, “The People’s Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics,” 32.

personnel.”<sup>206</sup> The PLAN’s focus on NCO development has been central to its enlisted force re-structuring ultimately reflecting the centrality of technical expertise proliferation to the PLAN personnel establishment.

The influence of the CCP is also integral to the modern PLAN enlisted force as CCP representation is present at every denomination level of personnel. For example:

Onboard ship...each department, division, and even work center includes a party committee or at least a representative. Although not necessarily a trained CCP commissar, this individual is usually a member of the CCP and is expected to function as its representative during the ship’s daily work...the CCP representative...will report up the party chain of command to the ship’s senior commissar, who usually holds the same rank as the ship’s commanding officer.<sup>207</sup>

This construct allows for comprehensive CCP permeation throughout the PLAN enlisted cadre reinforcing the influence of the party on all aspects of the PLAN. This element combined with the implementation of a fundamental personnel re-alignment strategy dedicated to bolstering broad technical proficiency is producing an enlisted force conducive to a PLAN modernization model predicated on the Taiwan problem set and opposing a technologically advanced United States force.

## **2. The Officer Corps**

The PLAN officer corps also personifies the dominant thematic strands of the PLAN personnel establishment in that “PLAN officers are expected to lead and to demonstrate operational skill and professional, political and technical knowledge in a complex, modern environment.”<sup>208</sup> Pursuant to this, the PLAN has undertaken a two-pronged approach to the shaping of its modern officer corps. The first prong concentrates on the reductionist method of downsizing.<sup>209</sup> The second prong concentrates on the acquisition and continuum of education for this trimmer, more elite cadre of officers. As

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 61.

<sup>208</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, “The People’s Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics,” 32.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

a result, the PLAN has stepped up the technical curriculums at its nine naval academies—the traditional commissioning source for PLAN officers.<sup>210</sup> Augmenting this effort is the PLA's implementation of:

The National Defense Student program (through which the PLAN) is pursuing especially ambitious Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC)-type programs by establishing 'science and technology cooperative ties' with more than one hundred colleges in twenty provinces and municipalities.<sup>211</sup>

In order to perpetuate a technically-savvy officer corps the PLAN has built on this initial accession educational paradigm by formalizing a career long continuum of education that is required for promotion comprised of expected mid-career attendance at “the Naval Command School in Nanjing which concentrates on courses in technical subjects (and senior officer attendance at) the National Defense University (NDU) in Beijing.”<sup>212</sup>

In addition to the PLAN's aforementioned political commissar system,<sup>213</sup> the CCP also controls all elements of PLAN officer personnel management.<sup>214</sup> This dynamic in concert with its refined officer accession and education strategy enables the modern PLAN's goal of producing “professionally qualified naval officers who are dedicated to China and to its Communist Party rulers.”<sup>215</sup> This construct complements the PLAN's enlisted cadre further bolstering a comprehensive personnel establishment that is both technically proficient and politically loyal—one custom-built to support broad modernization efforts aimed at a Taiwan contingency complicated by United States intervention.

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<sup>210</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, “The People's Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics,” 32. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 122.

<sup>211</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 122–123.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 128–129.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 140–141.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 137.

## C. THE MODERN PLAN'S TRAINING AND OPERATIONS

### 1. PLAN Training

PLAN training is primarily promulgated by the annual “Outline of Military Training and Evaluation (OMTE) issued by the PLA General Staff Department’s Military Training and Service Arms Department in Beijing.”<sup>216</sup> Recent iterations of the OMTE have indicated increased focus on technical training as “the 2009 OMTE (emphasized)...training in electromagnetic and joint operating environments and integrating new, advanced technologies into the force structure.”<sup>217</sup> This trend supports the broader PLAN focus on the Taiwan A2AD paradigm in that it manifests “vital lessons learned from its observations of recent U.S. operations and a conviction that the United States is the opponent it is most likely to face in the near future.”<sup>218</sup> A recent OMTE also reflects a recurring trend of increasing extra-Taiwan PLAN focus on the HADR paradigm in that it promulgates a training syllabus in which “military operations other than war (MOOTW) are prominently featured.”<sup>219</sup>

Though the OMTE offers evidence as to the PLAN’s intended training focus, it is much harder to discern a trend line in its practical application as the PLAN’s exercise curriculum is largely veiled by pervasive secrecy.<sup>220</sup> However, available evidence indicates that “the PLAN has maintained a steady program of exercises during the past decade (that) has grown steadily in both frequency and complexity.”<sup>221</sup> This trend line has also yielded evidence of surface and subsurface ASCM-based opposed force training and exercises set in advanced electromagnetic conditions.<sup>222</sup> The PLAN has also increased its participation in bi-lateral and multinational exercises in recent years its most

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>217</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, “The People’s Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics,” 35.

<sup>218</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 117.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>222</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, “The People’s Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics,” 36–39.

significant of these is its repeated engagement with Russian forces in the bi-lateral PEACE MISSION exercises in 2005, 2007 and 2009.<sup>223</sup> The relative frequency of these bi-lateral exercises has engendered speculation that “the Russians are...likely...to offer to resupply missiles and spare parts for the key Russian weapon systems that China would employ in combat with Taiwan and the United States.”<sup>224</sup> The concert of the PLAN’s observed domestic exercise trends and its established bi-lateral engagements with Russia suggests that the Taiwan counter-United States A2AD paradigm functions as the main influence on the PLAN training program.

## **2. PLAN Operations**

In addition to these observed training trends, the PLAN’s recent operations have been dominated by submarine activity in that “when compared to the historical levels of the last two decades, the number of submarine patrols over the last few years has more than tripled.”<sup>225</sup> This operational trend is consistent with PLAN materiel focus on submarine development. One significant example within this phenomenon was “in 2004 (when) a Han-class submarine apparently cruised all the way to Guam, circumnavigated the island...and surfaced on its return voyage to China.”<sup>226</sup> Exacerbating this precedent was “the ‘Song’ incident near Okinawa on 26 October 2006, when a Chinese diesel submarine reportedly penetrated the protective screen of the U.S. Navy’s *Kitty Hawk* carrier battle group.”<sup>227</sup> The concert of these incidents has stimulated conjecture that “Beijing may be using these encounters to send a signal to Washington, cautioning it

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<sup>223</sup> McVadon, “China’s Navy Today: Looking Toward Blue Water,” 379. Office of Naval Intelligence, 40.

<sup>224</sup> McVadon, “China’s Navy Today: Looking Toward Blue Water,” 379.

<sup>225</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, “The People’s Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics,” 40.

<sup>226</sup> Bernard D. Cole, “Beijing’s Strategy of Sea Denial,” *The Jamestown Foundation China Brief* 6, no. 23 (November 2006).  
[http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=32259&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=196&no\\_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=32259&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=196&no_cache=1) (accessed October 23, 2011).

<sup>227</sup> Gabriel B. Collins, Andrew S. Erickson and Lyle J. Goldstein, “Chinese Naval Analysts Consider the Energy Question,” in *China’s Energy Strategy: The Impact on Beijing’s Maritime Policies*, eds. Gabriel B. Collins, Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and William S. Murray (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 303.



against intervening in a Taiwan scenario.”<sup>228</sup> The confluence of PLAN emphasis on counter-United States submarine materiel development and an increased submarine operational tempo in which probing United States forces is a characteristic indicates the significance of opposing United States intervention in a Taiwan scenario as a prime impetus for the modern PLANs operational model.

The element of modern PLAN operations that best supports a shift toward the paradigm of PRC SLOC defense is its sustained counter-piracy deployments to the Gulf of Aden since 2009. These deployments demonstrate the PLAN’s ability to conduct limited power-projection type maritime operations as “each (task group is) composed of two destroyers or frigates and an underway replenishment ship (and) by all accounts, the ships have performed well during their deployments.”<sup>229</sup> However, categorizing these successive deployments as the PLAN’s nascent attempt at SLOC defense is flawed. Rather, these deployments function as an additional data point indicative of the PLAN’s embryonic extra-Taiwan focus on the MOOTW mission set which reinforces the now prevalent PRC foreign policy paradigms of “‘peaceful development’ and ‘harmonious world’.”<sup>230</sup>

The PLAN’s sustained participation in the counter-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden functions as a particularly useful diplomatic vehicle through which the PRC can propagate its global “‘charm offensive’.”<sup>231</sup> The counter-piracy mission is conducive to this dynamic in that piracy does not function as a globally de-stabilizing phenomenon and it is not polarizing because “pirates are hostes humani generis: nobody likes them and their actions have made them enemies to everyone; (as a result) counter piracy...is a great common enemy and a good chance for the forgotten art of maritime diplomacy.”<sup>232</sup> Pursuant to this, the PLAN “has gradually expanded (its) exposure to and connection

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<sup>228</sup> Cole, “Beijing’s Strategy of Sea Denial.”

<sup>229</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 157.

<sup>230</sup> Lanteigne, *Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction*, 12.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Alessandro Scheffler, “Piracy: Threat or Nuisance?” *Research Division NATO Defense College, Rome* no. 56 (February 2010), [http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/documents/rp\\_56en.pdf](http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/documents/rp_56en.pdf) (accessed October 25, 2011), 10.

with the U.S. Combined Task Force 151 (and) has apparently agreed to take up a leadership position in the Shared Awareness and De-confliction-the European Union counter-piracy coalition.”<sup>233</sup> Therefore, the PLAN’s participation in the relatively benign international counter-piracy mission functions more as an international political lever than as a precursor to a broader PLAN trend toward the SLOC defense paradigm.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

This chapter’s survey of the modern PLAN’s materiel, personnel, training and operational trends yields that its current focus is trained upon Taiwan and that mission’s inherent United States counter- interventionist A2AD model. Pursuant to this, the recent modernization trends of the PLAN are narrowly concentrated upon rapid technological advancement and development of capabilities to sufficiently counter or deter intervening United States Navy carrier strike groups. Despite the predominance of this dynamic, there is some limited evidence of extra-Taiwan mission influence within the modern PLAN. However, this limited evidence indicates nascent movement toward the development of PRC foreign policy-enhancing MOOTW capabilities rather than a concentration on PRC SLOC protection and defense. It must be re-iterated at this juncture that any evidence indicative of extra-Taiwan influence on the PLAN is imperfect and that the overwhelming majority of evidence indicates that the PLAN’s modernization trajectory is oriented toward Taiwan.

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<sup>233</sup> Yung and Rustici with Kardon and Wiseman, “China’s Out of Area Naval Operations: Case Studies, Trajectories, Obstacles and Potential Solutions,” 17.

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

The core charge of this thesis was to determine the extent of the balance between the PRC's military problem sets of Taiwan and SLOC protection as impetus for the PLAN's modern mission paradigm. In order to achieve this end, this thesis included a brief analysis of the PLA—and the PLAN as its subordinate service—since 1949 in order to identify characteristic trends and themes, a survey of the contemporary PRC security context so as to establish the hierarchy of Taiwan versus SLOC defense in that construct, and a comprehensive examination of the PLAN's modernization. These analyses have yielded that the PLAN functions as a complementary force within the defensively oriented PLA, the potential interventionism of the United States within a Taiwan conflict functions as the most exigent politico-military threat within the contemporary PRC security context, and the main focus for the PLAN's modernization is deterring and countering the United States in a Taiwan re-integration scenario. As a result, it is this thesis' conclusion that Taiwan functions as the prime impetus for the PLAN's modern mission paradigm. However, there are existential data points which indicate nascent development of extra-Taiwan PLAN mission sets. These embryonic indications do not represent a PLAN paradigm shift toward power-projection endeavors such as SLOC defense; but rather mark a movement toward increased military diplomacy that is in keeping with the PRC's prevailing security rubric of national defense.

### **A. SLOC DEFENSE, NOT A MILITARY ISSUE**

This thesis' analysis has reinforced the premise that, insofar as it pertains to the PLAN, the PRC's "priority for SLOC defense, especially concern for the security of its overseas energy supplies, does not play a major role in its national security policy process."<sup>234</sup> This is despite the phenomenon that some "Chinese navalists have become avid students of the American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan (who) pointed to the

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<sup>234</sup> Cole, "The Energy Factor in Chinese Maritime Strategy," 338.

importance of protecting SLOCs to markets abroad.”<sup>235</sup> However, the existential fact remains that the PRC “government has not officially embraced such (Mahanian) views.”<sup>236</sup> Rather, as this thesis has discussed, the PRC has pursued alternate, largely non-military methods to mitigate the SLOC defense paradigm. As a result, the PLAN “has no (SLOC-wide) network of facilities and bases to maintain and repair its ships.”<sup>237</sup> Nowhere is this more evident than “in the case of (the Pakistani string of pearls port of) Gwadar, as the Port of Singapore Authority prepares to run the facility for decades to come.”<sup>238</sup> Furthermore, this thesis has argued that PLAN materiel acquisitions, operations and training models do not indicate even a modest inclination toward the SLOC defense mission. SLOC defense will maintain its ancillary status within the PLAN mission profile until the PLAN demonstrates a marked paradigm shift that consists of three key criteria: 1) the hard acquisition of multiple auxiliary replenishment vessels, 2) the implementation and execution of an observed SLOC defense training syllabus and subsequent operational deployments, and 3) the distinct establishment of SLOC-wide naval outposts.

## **B. THE OUTLIERS: AMPHIBS, CARRIERS AND PIRATES**

This thesis has identified three key elements of the modern PLAN that serve as potential data points indicative of a PLAN mission paradigm shift to SLOC defense. These include the PLAN’s acquisition of the Yuzhao-class amphibious ship, marked advances in its carrier development program and the sustained counter-piracy deployments to the Gulf of Aden. This thesis has outlined why the connection of these elements to SLOC defense-related suppositions are inaccurate. However, there is a common thread among these three elements that points to an emergent extra-Taiwan PLAN mission set predicated on the PRC’s “two major foreign policy concepts (known

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<sup>235</sup> Carnes Lord, “China and Maritime Transformations,” in *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective*, eds. Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein and Carnes Lord (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 449.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Yung and Rustici with Kardon and Wiseman, “China’s Out of Area Naval Operations: Case Studies, Trajectories, Obstacles and Potential Solutions,” 2.

<sup>238</sup> Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*, 11.

as) ‘peaceful development’ and ‘harmonious world.’”<sup>239</sup> These themes have crept into PRC defense parlance as the 2010 white paper outlines the “interests of national development (and) maintaining world peace and stability (as core) goals and tasks of China’s national defense in the new era.”<sup>240</sup>

This thesis has articulated and identified speculation that potential impetus for the acquisition of the Yuzhao-class amphibious ship and development of a carrier program stems from the PLAN’s desire to bolster its organic MOOTW capabilities—specifically in the realm of HADR.<sup>241</sup> This speculation is supported by the fact that “it is well known that China was embarrassed in the aftermath of the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami when the PLAN was obliged by a lack of suitable platforms to stand on the sidelines as several other countries...deployed naval forces to provide humanitarian relief.”<sup>242</sup> In reaction to this, “in November 2007 Beijing established the National Committee for International Humanitarian Law for the purpose of enhancing the PLA’s knowledge and capabilities to conduct international humanitarian operations.”<sup>243</sup> This data point lends credence to postulations that extra-Taiwan MOOTW-type missions are an impetus behind the PLAN’s recent amphibious ship and carrier developments. Though certainly in its nascent stages, this is certainly a plausible supposition as this thesis has indicated that the Yuzhao-class amphibious ship and carrier program’s utility within the SLOC-defense paradigm is limited.

The PLAN’s sustained counter-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden functions in the similar vein as it reflects what many consider “Beijing’s desire to be seen as a responsible stakeholder in ensuring maritime security (and) it enhances China’s image as

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<sup>239</sup> Lanteigne, *Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction*, 12.

<sup>240</sup> The People’s Republic of China Information Office of the State Council, *China’s National Defense in 2010*, (March 2011): 5–6.

<sup>241</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 107. Glosny, Saunders and Ross, “Debating China’s Naval Nationalism,” 167. Yung and Rustici with Kardon and Wiseman, “China’s Out of Area Naval Operations: Case Studies, Trajectories, Obstacles and Potential Solutions,” 46.

<sup>242</sup> Kostecka, “PLA Doctrine and the Employment of Sea-Based Airpower,” 23.

<sup>243</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 126.

a responsible member of the global community.”<sup>244</sup> This thesis has indicated that the PLAN’s participation in the multi-national counter-piracy effort fits this mold as counter piracy functions as a benign mission through which to propagate diplomacy.<sup>245</sup> Pursuant to this, within the counter-piracy framework the PRC has engaged in “cooperation with other world navies...especially those of the developed world (in an apparent attempt to) effectively dispel the ‘China Threat theory’.”<sup>246</sup> The confluence of this dynamic and the PLAN’s modern amphibious and carrier programs indicates the nascent influence of a MOOTW-centric extra-Taiwan mission set on the PLAN’s modernization efforts.

### C. TAIWAN...FOR NOW

This thesis has re-affirmed that certain extra-Taiwan elements of “naval and energy policy vectors are developing within the context of China’s peaceful development strategy, and more broadly in a global strategic environment at least partly conditioned by China’s ‘new diplomacy’.”<sup>247</sup> Though this may be the case, this thesis maintains that the PLAN’s immediate focus is trained on Taiwan and by extension the United States. This thesis echoes Bernard D. Cole’s observation that the PRC “evinces no evidence of pursuing a global, Wilhelmine navy, but rather building a twenty-first century navy capable of achieving national security objectives.”<sup>248</sup> In the current setting, Taiwan functions as the most exigent threat to PRC national security and accordingly the core impetus for the PLAN’s modernization. It is also apparent that the SLOC defense mission set does not play a significant role in shaping the modern PLAN. However, evidence of other nascent, MOOTW-related extra-Taiwan strands indicates that the PLAN’s modern mission paradigm is fundamentally pliable.

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<sup>244</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, “The People’s Liberation Army-Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics,” 11.

<sup>245</sup> Scheffler, “Piracy: Threat or Nuisance?” 10.

<sup>246</sup> Collins, Erickson, and Goldstein, “Chinese Naval Analysts Consider the Energy Question,” 325.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>248</sup> Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 168.

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